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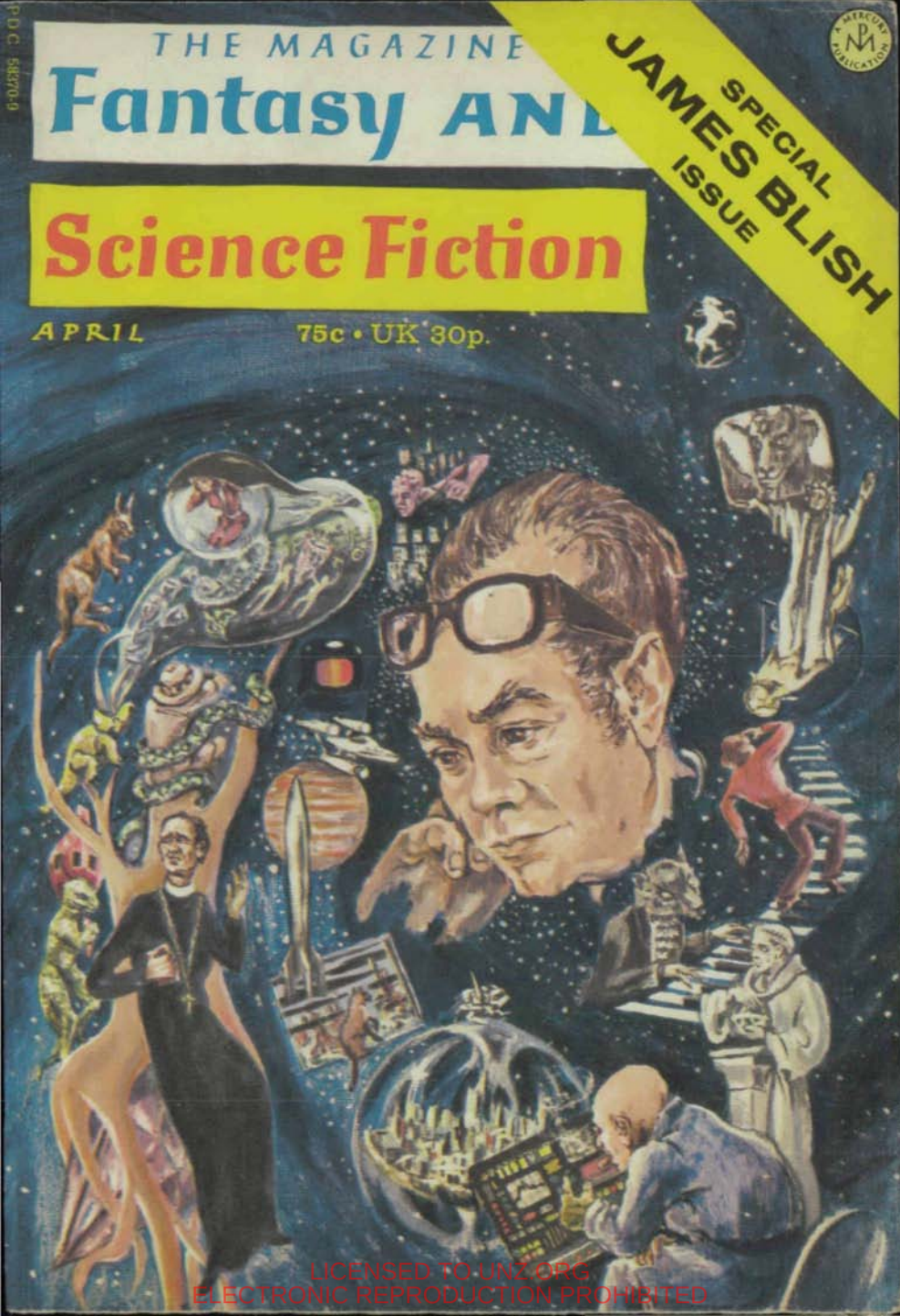

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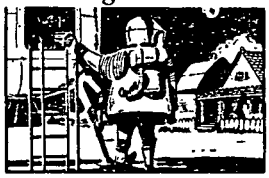

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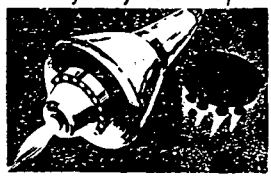

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What makes this issue even a bit more special than the previous in our series devoted to distinguished authors in sf is that for the first time we are able to offer a complete new novel. (MIDSUMMER CENTURY will be published in hard covers by Doubleday, but not one word has been cut in the version you are about to read.) This is in part due to the fortunate fact that James Blish is capable of creating stories that tower rather than sprawl. The scope of this story is grand; it will take you 23,000 years into a richly imagined future and do it without wasting a word. Jim called it a "pure adventure story, which one doesn't see often in these over-earnest days." We'll only add that we think it's also a memorable one.

Midsummer Century

by JAMES BLISH

1.

IN ALL THE OINTMENT which the world had provided for the anointing of John Martels, D.Sc., F.R.A.S., etc., there was only one fly: there was something wrong with his telescope.

Martels, unmarried and 30, was both a statistic and a beneficiary of what his British compatriots were bitterly calling the brain-drain, the luring of the best English minds to the United States by higher pay, lower taxes, and the apparent absence of any class system whatsoever. And he had found no reason to regret it, let alone feel guilty about it. Both his parents were dead, and as far as he was concerned, he owed the United Kingdom nothing any more.

Of course, the advantages of living in the States were not quite so unclouded as they had been presented to him, but he had never expected anything else. Take the apparent absence of a class system, for instance: All the world knew that the blacks, the Spanish-Americans, and the poor in general were discriminated against ferociously in the States and that political opposition of any kind to the Establishment was becoming increasingly dangerous. But what counted as far as he was concerned was that it was not the same *sort* of class system.

Born of a working-class family in the indescribably ugly city of Doncaster, Martels had been cursed from the outset with a working-class Midlands dialect which excluded him

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from the "right" British circles as permanently and irrevocably as if he had been a smuggled Pakistani immigrant. No "public" school had been financially available to his parents to help him correct the horrible sound of his own voice, nor to give him the classical languages which in his youth had still been necessary for entry into Oxford or Cambridge.

Instead, he had ground, kicked, bitten and otherwise fought his way through one of the new redbrick polytechnics. Though he emerged at the end with the highest possible First in astrophysics, it was with an accent still so atrocious as to deny him admittance to any but the public side—never the lounge or saloon—of any bar in Britain.

In the States, on the other hand, accents were regarded as purely regional, and a man's education was judged not by his inflection but by his grammar, vocabulary, and the state of his knowledge. To be sure, Martels was disturbed by the condition of the Negro, the Spanish-Americans, and the poor; but since he was none of these things, he was not oppressed by it.

As for political activity, that was absolutely out for Martels; he was an alien here. Were he to so much as raise a placard, regardless of what was written on it, he could lose his passport.

The money situation had worked out in very much the same way. While there was a lot more of it available here than there was in England, in places like New York they took it away from you almost faster than you could make it; but Martels was not in New York. After a brief but moderately spectacular lectureship as a radio astronomer at Jodrell Bank, he had been hired as Director of Research in the field by a new but already sprawling university in the American midwest, where money went a good deal farther—and where, in addition, Negroes, Spanish-Americans, and the poor were in invisibly short supply. He could not quite put their plight out of his mind, but at least it was easier on the conscience to have it out of sight. The sailplaning here wasn't as good as it had been in the Childern Hills, but you can't have everything.

And there had been a final inducement: Sockette State had just completed construction of a radio telescope of a radically new design, a combination of mile-square dipole arrays and steerable dish with a peculiar, bowl-like glacial gouge in the landscape which made all its predecessors seem as primitive as the optical machine Galileo had filched from Hans Lippershey. The combination made it possible to mount a dish rather smaller than the one at Jodrell Bank and involved, instead, a wave-guide focal point almost as big, and as skeletal, as the tubular frame of a 65-inch optical reflecting telescope. It took a startling amount of power to drive the thing—over and above the power necessary to steer it—but in theory at least, it ought to penetrate far enough around the

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universe to pick up the radio equivalent of the temperature at the back of Martel's own neck.

At first sight, he had been as pleased with it as a father who has just bought his son a new electric train. Just trying to imagine what great events might be recorded by such an instrument was splendid. It seemed to pose only one problem.

Thus far, it couldn't be made to pick up anything but the local rock-and-roll station.

There was nothing wrong with the theory, of that he was quite certain. The design was as sound as it could possibly be. So was the circuitry; he had tested that out repeatedly and intensively. The only other possibility was a flaw in the gross construction of the telescope, probably something so simple as a girder out of true in the wave guide which would distort either the field or the transmission.

Well, there was at least one thing to be said for a redbrick university: it did nothing for either your Greek or your English, but it insisted that its physical scientists also be passable engineers before it let you graduate. Warming up the amplifier, tuning it, and cranking the gain up all the way—a setting which should have effectively relocated the campus of Sockette State in the heart of Ursa Major No. 2, a cluster of galaxies half a billion light-years away—he crossed the parabolic aluminum basketwork of the steerable antenna and scrambled up the wave guide, field strength detector in hand; awkwardly, it was too big to be put into a pocket.

Gaining the lip of the wave guide, he sat down for a rest, feet dangling, peering down the inside of the tube. The program now was to climb down into there slowly in a tight spiral, calling out the field intensity readings at intervals to the technicians on the floor.

Redbrick polytechnics insist that their physical scientists also be engineers, but they neglect to turn them into steeplejacks as well. Martels was not even wearing a hard hat. Settling one sneakered foot into what appeared to be a perfectly secure angle between one girder and another, he slipped and fell headlong down the inside of the tube.

He did not even have time to scream, let alone to hear the shouts of alarm from the technicians, for he lost consciousness long before he hit bottom.

In fact, he never hit bottom at all.

It would be possible to explain exactly and comprehensively what happened to John Martels instead, but to do so would require several pages of expressions in the metalanguage invented by Dr. Thor Wald, a Swedish theoretical physicist, who unfortunately was not scheduled to be born until the year 2060. Suffice it to say that, thanks to the shoddy workmanship of an unknown welder, Sockette State's radical new radio telescope did indeed have an unprecedented reach—but not in any direction that its designers had

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intended, or could even have conceived.

2.

"Ennoble me with the honor of your attention, immortal Qvant."

Swimming upward from blackness, Martels tried to open his eyes and found that he could not. Nevertheless, in a moment he realized that he could see. What he saw was so totally strange to him that he tried to close them again, and found he could not do that, either. He seemed, in fact, completely paralyzed; he could not even change his field of view.

He wondered briefly if the fall had broken his neck. But that shouldn't affect his control of his eye muscles, should it? Or of his eyelids?

Besides, he was not in a hospital; of that much, at least, he could be sure. What was visible to him was a vast, dim hall in bad repair. There seemed to be sunlight coming from overhead, but whatever there was up there that was admitting it was not letting much through.

He had a feeling that the place ought to be musty, but he seemed to have no sense of smell left. The voice he had heard, plus a number of small, unidentifiable echoes, told him that he could still hear, at least. He tried to open his mouth, again without result.

There seemed to be nothing for it but to take in what little was visible and audible, and try to make as much sense as possible of whatever facts that brought him. What was he sitting or lying upon? Was it warm or cool? No, those senses were gone too. But at least he did not seem to be in any pain—though whether that meant that that sense was gone too, or that he was either drugged or repaired, couldn't be guessed. Nor was he hungry or thirsty—again an ambiguous finding.

About the floor of the hall within his cone of vision was a scatter of surpassingly strange artifacts. The fact that they were at various distances enabled him to establish that he could at least still change his depth of focus. Some of the objects seemed to be more decayed than the hall itself. In a number of instances the state, if any, of decay was impossible to judge, because the things seemed to be sculptures or some other kind of works of art, representing he knew not what—if anything, for representational art had been out of fashion all his life, anyhow. Others, however, were plainly machines; and though in no case could he even guess their intended functions, he knew corrosion when he saw it. This stuff had been out of use a long, long time.

Something was still functioning, though. He could hear the faintest of continuous hums, like a 50-cycle line noise. It seemed to come from somewhere behind him, intimately close, as though some spectral barber were applying to the back of his skull or neck a massaging device intended for the head of a gnat.

He did not think that the place, or

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at least the chamber of it that he seemed to be in, was exceptionally large. If the wall that was visible to him was a side rather than an end—which of course he had no way of determining—and the remembered echoes of the voice were not misleading, then it could not be much bigger than one of the central galleries in the Alte Pinakothek, say the Rubens room—

The comparison clicked neatly into place. He was in a museum of some sort. And one both without maintenance and completely unpopular, too, for the floor was thick with dust, and there were only a few footprints in that, and in some cases none at all, near the exhibits (if that was what they were). The footprints, he registered without understanding, were all those of bare feet.

Then, there came that voice again, this time with rather a whining edge to it. It said:

"Immortal Qvant, advise me, I humbly pray."

And with a triple shock, he heard himself replying:

"You may obtrude yourself upon my attention, tribesman."

The shock was triple because, first of all, he had had no intention or sensation of either formulating the reply or of uttering it. Second, the voice in which it came out was most certainly not his own; it was deeper, and unnaturally loud, yet seemed to be almost without resonance. Third, the language was one he had never heard before in his life, yet he seemed to understand it perfectly.

Besides, my name is not and has never been Qvant. I don't even have a middle initial.

But he was given no time to speculate, for there now sidled into sight, in a sort of cringing crouch which Martels found somehow offensive, something vaguely definable as a human being. He was naked and dark brown, with what Martels judged to be a mixture of heredity and a deep tan. The nakedness also showed him to be scrupulously clean, his arms short, his legs long, his pelvis narrow. His hair was black and crinkled like a Negro's, but his features were Caucasoid, except for an Asian eyelid-fold, rather reminding Martels of an African bushman—an impression strengthened by his small stature. His expression, unlike his posture, was respectful, almost reverent, but not at all frightened.

"What would you have of me now, tribesman?" Martel's new voice said.

"Immortal Qvant, I seek a ritual for the protection of our maturity ceremonies from the Birds. They have penetrated the old one, for this year many of our new young men lost their eyes to them, and some even their lives. My ancestors tell me that such a ritual was known in rebirth three, and is better than ours, but they cannot give me the details."

"Yes, it exists," Martels' other voice said. "And it will serve you perhaps two to five years. But in the end, the Birds will penetrate this too. In the end, you will be forced to abandon the ceremonies."

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"To do this would also be to surrender the afterlife!"

"That is doubtless true, but would this necessarily be a great surrender? You need your young men here and now, to hunt, procreate, and fight the Birds. I am barred from any knowledge of the afterlife, but what gives you any assurance that it is pleasant? What satisfactions can remain for all those crowded souls?"

In some indefinable way, Martels could tell from Qvant's usage that "Birds" was capitalized; he had caught no hint of this in the speech of the petitioner, whose expression had now changed to one of subdued horror. He noticed also that Qvant spoke to the presumable savage as anyone would address an educational equal and that the naked man spoke in the same way. But of what use was the information? For that matter, what was Martels, presumably a man miraculously recovering from a major accident, doing in a moldering museum, helplessly eavesdropping upon an insane conversation with a naked "tribesman" who asked *queastiones* like a medieval student addressing St. Thomas Aquinas?

"I do not know, immortal Qvant," the petitioner was saying. "But without the ceremonies, we shall have no new generations of ancestors, and memory in the afterlife fades rapidly. Who in the end should we have left to advise us but yourself?"

"Who indeed?"

From the faint tone of irony in his voice, Qvant had probably intended the question to be rhetorical, but in any case Martels had had enough. Mustering every dyne of will power he could manage to summon, he strove to say:

"Will somebody kindly tell me what the hell is going on here?"

It came out, and in his own voice, though without any physical sensation of speaking. And in that same unknown language, too.

There was a moment of complete silence after the echoes died, during which Martels felt a sensation of shock which he was sure was not his own. Then the petitioner gasped and ran.

This time, Martels' eyes tracked, though not of his own volition, following the fleeing man until he had vanished through a low, groined, sunlit doorway beyond which was what appeared to be a dense green forest or jungle. His guess at the size and shape of the hall was thus confirmed, and he now knew also that it was at ground level. Then his eyes returned to their stony and boring regard of the facing wall and the neglected, meaningless artifacts.

"Who are you?" the Qvant-voice said. "And how have you invaded my brain?"

"*Your* brain?"

"This is my brain, and I am its rightful occupant—the precious personality of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life. I have been thus encased and maintained since the end of Rebirth Three, of which era what you see is the museum. The men of

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Rebirth Four regard me as a quasi-god, and they do well to do so." The menace in that last sentence was unmistakable. "I repeat, who are you, and how have you come here?"

"My name is John Martels, and I haven't the faintest idea how I got here. And nothing I've seen or heard makes the faintest sense to me. I was within a couple of seconds of certain death, and then suddenly, here I was. That's all I know."

"I caution you to tell the truth," Qvant said heavily. "Else I shall dispossess you, and then you will die within two or three seconds—or go on to the afterlife, which amounts to the same thing."

Martels felt an instant flash of caution. Despite the fact that the two of them seemed to share the same brain, this creature evidently could not read Martels' mind, and there might well be some advantage to be gained in withholding some of what little information he had. He had, after all, no guarantee that Qvant would not "dispossess" him anyhow, once the "quasi-god's" curiosity was satisfied. Martels said, with a desperation more than half real:

"I don't know what it is you want to know."

"How long have you been lurking here?"

"I don't know."

"What is your earliest memory?"

"Of staring at that wall."

"For how long?" Qvant said implacably.

"I don't know. I didn't think to count the days. Nothing ever seemed to happen, until your petitioner spoke."

"And what did you hear of my thoughts during that time?"

"Nothing I could understand," Martels said, being extremely careful not to hesitate after "nothing." Strange as it was to find himself apparently talking to himself like a split personality, it was stranger still to realize that neither psyche could read the mind of the other—and, somehow, immensely important that Qvant's opposite assumption should not be brought into question.

"That is not surprising. Yet I sense an anomaly in yours. You have the mind of a young man, but there is an aura about it which paradoxically suggests that it is even older than mine. To which Rebirth do you belong?"

"I'm sorry, but the question is completely meaningless to me."

"In what year were you born, then?" Qvant said, with obvious surprise.

"Nineteen fifty-five."

"By what style of dating?"

"Style? I don't understand that either. We called it A.D., *anno Domini*, after the birth of Christ. Insofar as anybody could be sure, He was born about seventeen thousand years after the human race invented written records."

There was quite a long silence after this. Martels wondered what Qvant was thinking. For that matter, he wondered what he himself was thinking; whatever it was, it was

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nothing useful. He was an alien personality in someone else's brain, and that someone else was talking nonsense to him—someone whose prisoner he was, and who also seemed to be a prisoner, though at the same time he claimed to be a sort of god, and Martels had seen him being consulted as one—

"I see," Qvant said suddenly. "Without the central computer I cannot be accurate, but precision seems hardly necessary here. By your system, the present year is roughly Twenty-Five Thousand A.D."

This last shock Martels could not take. His insecurely re-embodied mind, still aquiver with the sick edginess of its escape from death, bombarded with meaningless facts, now under a new threat of death whose very nature he could not begin to comprehend, went reeling back toward the pit.

And at the same instant, it was assaulted with cold, wordless ferocity. Qvant *was* going to throw him out.

Never before had he even dreamed it possible that a man could be thrown out of his own mind by someone else—and this was not even his own mind; here, he was the interloper. There seemed to be no way to resist, nothing that he could even grab hold of—even had he been inhabiting his own brain, he would have known no better than any other man of his time in what part of it his psyche resided. Qvant knew, that was evident, and was homing upon it with the mercilessness of a guided missile; and the terrible, ousting pressure was entirely emotional, without the faintest semantic cue which might have helped Martels to fight back.

The rotting hall wavered and vanished. Once more, Martels was without sight, and without hearing. By instinct alone, he dug into... something...and held hard, like a crab-louse resisting being shaken off the hide of a jackal.

The terrible battering went on and on. There was in the end nothing to cling to at all but a thought, one single thought:

I am I. I am I. I am I.

And then, slowly, miraculously, the attack began to subside. As before, sound returned first, the faint ambiguous echoes of the museum; and then, sight, the sight of that same stretch of wall and floor, and those same lumpy monuments to and momentos of some far past in Martel's even farther future.

"It appears that I cannot be rid of you yet," Qvant said. The tone of his amplified voice seemed to hover somewhere between icy fury and equally icy amusement. "Very well, we shall hold converse, you and I. It will be a change from being an oracle to tribesmen. But sooner or later, Martels-from-the-past, sooner or later I shall catch you out—and then you will come to know the greatest thing that I do not know: What the afterlife is like. Sooner or later, Martels...sooner or later..."

Just in time, Martels realized that the repetitions were the hypnotic

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prelude to a new attack. Digging into whatever it had been that he had saved himself with before, that unknown substrate of the part of this joint mind that belonged to him alone, he said with equal iciness:

"Perhaps. You have a lot to teach me, if you will, and I'll listen. And maybe I can teach you something, too. But I think I can also make you extremely uncomfortable, Qvant; you've just shown me two different ways to go about that. So perhaps you had better mind your manners, and bear in mind that, however the tribesmen see you, you're a long way from being a god to me."

For answer, Qvant simply prevented Martels from saying another word. Slowly, the sun set, and the shapes in the hall squatted down into a darkness against which Martels was not even allowed to close his unowned eyes.

3.

Martels was alive, still, which was something to be grateful for, but it was hardly a famous victory. Qvant could not throw him out—as yet—but Martels still had no control over his eyes, or their eyes, except the minimum one of changing depth of focus; and it seemed either that Qvant himself could not close the eyes, or never bothered to. Always, except when the rare petitioner came into the museum, they stared at that same damn wall and the blobby things in front of it.

Furthermore, Qvant never slept, and therefore, neither did Martels. Whatever mechanism kept the brain going in its unviewable case, it seemed to make sleep unnecessary, which was perhaps fortunate, since Martels had no confidence in his ability to resist another of Qvant's attacks were he unconscious at the time.

This was just one of many aspects of their joint existence which Martels did not understand. Obviously, some sort of perfusion pump—that persistent tiny hum at the back of his head, like a sort of tinnitus—could continuously supply oxygen and blood sugar, carry away lactic acid, abolish fatigue. But it was Martel's cloudy memory that there was more to sleep than that: dreams, for instance, were essential to clear the computer-analog that was the brain of the previous day's programs. Perhaps mere evolution had bred that need out of the race, although 25,000 years seemed like a prohibitively short time for so major a change.

Whatever the answer, it could not prevent boredom, to which Qvant seemed to be entirely immune. Evidently he had vast inner resources, accumulated over centuries, with which to amuse himself through the endless days and nights; but to these, Martels had no access whatsoever. Martels concealed this fact as best he could, for it seemed increasingly important to him that Qvant's impression that Martels could overhear some of his thoughts should be encouraged; for all his obvious power

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and accumulated knowledge, Qvant did not seem to suspect the totality of the mind-brain barrier between them.

Nor would Qvant allow Martels to talk except when the two of them were alone, and mostly not even then. He seemed essentially incurious, or preoccupied, or both; and months went by between petitioners. Between the rare apparitions of the brown savages, the few new things Martels was able to learn were mostly negative and useless.

He was helpless, and that was most thoroughly that. Every so often, he found himself almost wishing that this mad nightmare should end with the shattering impact of his own unprotected head upon the center of the radio telescope dish, like that merciless story that Ambrose Bierce had written about an incident at Owl Creek Bridge.

But occasionally there were the petitioners, and during their visits Martels listened and learned, a little. Even more rarely, Qvant had sudden, abortive bursts of loquaciousness, which were rather more productive of information, though always frustrating in the end. During one of these, Martels found himself allowed to ask:

"What was that business with the first tribesman that I saw—the one who wanted a protective ritual? Were you really about to give him some kind of rigmarole?"

"I was, and it would not have been a rigmarole," Qvant said. "It would have been an entirely functional complex of diagrams and dances. He will come back for it in due course."

"But how could it possibly work?"

"Between any two events in the universe which are topologically identical there is a natural affinity or repulsion, which can be expressed in diagrammatic form. The relationship is dynamic, and therefore must be acted out; whether attraction or repulsion occurs depends entirely upon the actions. That is the function of the dances."

"But that's magic—sheer superstition!"

"On the contrary," Qvant said. "It is natural law, and was practiced successfully for many centuries before the principles behind it were formulated. The tribesmen understand this very well, although they would not describe it in the same terms I have. It is simply a working part of their lives. Do you think they would continue to consult me if they found that the advice that I gave them did not work? They are uncivilized, but they are not insane."

And, upon another such occasion:

"You seem to accept the tribesmen's belief that there is really a life after death. Why?"

"I accept it on the evidence; the tribesmen communicate regularly and reliably with their recent ancestors. I have no personal experience in this field whatsoever, but there is also a sound theoretical basis for it."

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"And what's that?" Martels said.

"The same principle which allows both of us to inhabit the same brain. The personality is a semistable electromagnetic field; to remain integrated, it requires the supplementary computing apparatus of a brain, as well as an energy source such as a body, or this case we live in, to keep it in its characteristic state of negative entropy. Once the field is set free by death, it loses all ability to compute and becomes subject to normal entropy losses. Hence, slowly but inevitably, it fades."

"Still, why have you had no personal experience of it? I should have thought that originally—"

"The discovery," Qvant said, in a voice suddenly remote, "is relatively recent. No such communication is possible except along the direct ancestral line, and my donors—whoever they were—had dissipated centuries before the mere possibility was known."

"Just exactly how old are you, anyhow?" Martels said. But Qvant would say no more.

That conversation, however, did give Martels a little further insight into the characters of the tribesmen, and together with some other bits and scraps of evidence, a vague picture of history as well. Various references to "Rebirths" had enabled him to guess that civilization had been destroyed and rebuilt four times since his own period, but had emerged each time much changed, and each time less viable. Rebirth II had apparently been snuffed out by a world-wide glaciation; inevitably, Rebirth III had taken the form of a tightly organized, high-energy culture upon a small population base.

Now, however, the whole Earth, except for the Poles, was at the height of a tropical phase. Some of the technological knowledge of Rebirth III was still here in the museum in which Martels was doubly imprisoned, a fraction of it still intact and a rather larger fraction not too far decayed to be unrecoverable by close study. But the tribesmen of Rebirth IV had no use for it. Not only did they no longer understand it, but they thought it not worth understanding or salvaging. The fact that food was to be had for the picking or hunting with relative ease made machinery unnecessary to them—and their legends of what Rebirth III had been like made machinery repugnant to them as well. Their placid, deep-jungle kind of economy suited them very well.

But there was more to it than that. Their outlook had undergone a racial change which could only be attributed to the discovery of the real existence of the ghosts of their ancestors. It had become mystical, ritualistic, and, in a deep sense, ascetic—that is, they were death-oriented, or afterlife-oriented. This explained, too, the ambiguity of their attitude toward Qvant. They respected, indeed were awed by, the depth of his knowledge, and called upon it occasionally for solutions to problems which were beyond their

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understanding—so far beyond as to override their fierce sense of individuality; yet worshiping him was out of the question. Toward an entity which had no rapport with its ancestors, had never ever once experienced such a rapport, and seemed destined never to have an afterlife of its own, they could feel only pity.

Doubtless it occasionally occurred to a few of them that even the apparently indestructible brain-case could not be immune to something really major in the way of disasters, such as the birth of a volcano immediately under the museum itself; but Qvant had been there, insofar as their own legends could attest, forever already; and their own lives were short. The death of Qvant was not in the short-term future of which they were accustomed to think.

Most of Qvant's conversation, however, was far less revealing. He seemed to be almost permanently in a kind of Zen state; conscious of mastery and at the same time contemptuous of it. Many of his answers to petitioners consisted only of abrupt single sentences which seemed to have no connection whatsoever with the question that had been asked. Occasionally, too, he would respond with a sort of parable which was not one whit more comprehensible for being longer. For example:

"Immortal Qvant, some of our ancestors now tell us that we should clear some of the jungle and begin to sow. Others tell us to remain content with reaping. How should we resolve this conflict?"

"When Qvant was a man, twelve students gathered upon a cliffside to hear him speak. He asked of them what they would have him say that they could not hear from their own mouths. All replied at once; so that no single reply could be heard. Qvant said: 'You have too many heads for one body,' and pushed eleven of them over the cliff."

Humiliatingly for Martels, in such situations the tribesmen always seemed to understand at once whatever it was Qvant was conveying, and to go away satisfied with it. On that particular occasion, though, Martels had managed to come up with an inspired guess:

"Obviously, agriculture can't be revived under these conditions."

"No," Qvant said. "But to what particular conditions do you refer?"

"None, I don't know anything about them. In fact, agriculture amidst jungle ecologies was quite common in my time. I could just somehow sense that that was what you meant."

Qvant said nothing further, but Martels could indeed feel, although dimly, his disturbance. Another phantom brick had been laid upon the edifice of Qvant's belief that he had less than total privacy from Martels.

Of course Qvant had deduced almost immediately from the nature and phraseology of most of Martels' questions that Martels had been some

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infinitely primitive equivalent of a scientist, and furthermore that Martels' eavesdropping did not go deep enough to penetrate to Qvant's own store of scientific knowledge. Sometimes, Qvant seemed to take a perverse pleasure in answering Martels' questions in this area with apparent candor and at the same time in the most useless possible terms:

"Qvant, you keep saying you will never die. Barring accidents, of course. But surely the energy source for this brain-case apparatus must have a half-life, no matter how long it is, and the output will fall below the minimum necessary level *some* day."

"The source is not radioactive and has no half-life. It comes from the Void, the origin—in terms of spherical trigonometry—of inner space."

"I don't understand the terms. Or do you mean that it taps continuous creation? Has that been proven to go on?"

This term was in turn unfamiliar to Qvant, and for once he was curious enough to listen to Martels' explanation of the "steady state" theory of Fred Hoyle.

"No, that is nonsense," Qvant said at the end. "Creation is both unique and cyclical. The origin of inner space is elsewhere, and not explicable except in terms of general juganity—the psychology of the wavicle."

"*The* wavicle? There's only one?"

"Only one, though it has a thousand aspects."

"And it thinks?" Martels said in astonishment.

"No, it does not think. But it has will, and behaves accordingly. Understand its will, and you are the master of its behavior."

"But how does one tap this power, then?"

"By meditation, initially. Thereafter, it cannot be lost."

"No, I mean how does the machine—"

Silence.

Martels was learning, but nothing he learned seemed to get him anywhere. Then, one year, a petitioner asked another question about the Birds; and when in all innocence Martels asked afterwards, "What are these Birds, anyhow?" the levin-stroke of hatred and despair which stabbed out of Qvant's mind into his own told him in an instant that he had at long last happened upon something absolutely crucial—

If only he could figure out how to use it.

4.

So obvious was the depth of Qvant's emotions, into which were mixed still others to which Martels could put no name, that Martels expected no reply at all. But after a pause not much more than twice as long as usual, Qvant said:

"The Birds are humanity's doom—and mine and yours too, eventually, my uninvited and unwelcome guest. Did you think evolution had stood

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still during more than twenty-three thousand years—even without considering the peak in world-wide circumambient radioactivity which preceded Rebirth One?"

"No, of course not, Qvant. The tribesmen are obviously a genetic mixture that was unknown in my time, and naturally I assumed that there have been mutations, as well."

"You see nothing but surfaces," Qvant said with steely contempt. "They show many marks of evolutionary advance and change which are beyond your observation. For a single, simple-minded example, at the beginning of Rebirth Four, when the jungle became nearly world-wide, man was still an animal who had to practice the principles of nutrition consciously, and the tribesmen of that time did not have the knowledge. As a result, no matter how much they ate—and there was never any shortage even then, not even of protein—they died in droves of a typical disease of jungle populations whose name would mean nothing to you, but which might be described as 'malignant malnutrition'."

"That was well known in my time, and not only in jungle populations. We called it marasmus, but there were lots of local names: kwashiorkor, sukha—"

"None of these words, of course, have survived. In any event, shortly thereafter there occurred a major mutation which made proper nutrition a hereditary instinct—as it has always been with wild animals, and presumably was when man was a wild animal. Probably it was domesticated out.

"Another change, equally radical and perhaps not dissimilar in origin, occurred after the formulation of general juganity toward the very end of Rebirth Three. It was then found that the human brain had considerable hypnotic and projective power usable without the intervention of any prehypnotic ritual whatsoever. The theory showed how this could be done reliably, but the power had been perhaps always latent, or it may have been the result of a mutation—nobody is sure, nor does the question seem to be of any interest now.

"In me, these powers are massive—because I was specially bred to heighten them, among many others—but their action among the tribesmen is quite the opposite, in that their rapport with their ancestors makes them peculiarly *susceptible* to such hypnosis rather than good practitioners of it. They have become patients rather than agents.

"The animals, too, have changed—and in particular, the birds. Birds were always elaborate ritualists, and in the aura of pervasive ceremony and juganity characteristic of Rebirth Four, they have evolved dangerously. They are now sophonts—sentient, intelligent, self-conscious—and have an elaborate postprimitive culture. They properly regard man as their principal rival, and their chief aim is to exterminate him.

"In this they will succeed. Their

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chief drive is toward survival in the here-and-now; the tribesmen, on the other hand, are increasingly too interested in death itself as a goal to make effective antagonists for them, regardless of the fact that they are still man's intellectual inferiors by at least one order of magnitude."

"I find that hard to believe," Martels said. "We had humans in that stage in my time, operating that kind of culture—the Eskimos, the Australian aborigines, the South African bushmen. None of them were as aggressive as you imply that the Birds are, but even had they been, they never would have had a chance against the pragmatic intellectuals of the period. In fact, when I left, they were on the verge of extinction."

"The modern tribesman is neither intellectual or pragmatic," Qvant said scornfully. "He will not use machines, except for simple hunting weapons; his only major defenses are ritual and juganity, at which the Birds are instinctively expert, and becoming more so all the time. When they become also intellectually expert, the end will be at hand.

"And so will ours. I have detailed reasons, both theoretical and technical, to believe that once the human population falls below a certain level, the power which supports this brain-case of ours will begin to fail, and thereafter, the case itself will fall apart. Even if it does not, the Birds, if they win—as they are certain to—will have millennia to wait for it to fall apart by itself, which is not impossible. Then they will pick the brain to pieces, and good-by to both of us."

In Qvant's voice there seemed to be a certain gloomy but savage satisfaction in the thought. Martels said cautiously:

"But why? You represent no threat to them whatsoever that I can see. Even the tribesmen consult you very seldom, and never about effective weapons. Why should the Birds not ignore you altogether?"

"Because," Qvant said slowly, "they are symbolists. . .and they hate and dread me above all other entities in the universe as a prime symbol of past human power."

"How can that be?"

"How have you failed to guess that? I was the reigning Supreme Autarch at the end of Rebirth Three, bred to the task and charged with the preservation of everything that Rebirth Three had learned, whatever happened. Without access to the computer, I am incapable of discharging that entire duty. . .but it is nevertheless to that charge that I owe my present immortal imprisonment. And my doom—and yours—beneath the beaks of the Birds."

"Can't you prevent this? For instance, by hypnotizing the tribesmen into some sort of positive action against the Birds? Or is your control too limited?"

"I could exercise absolute control of a tribesman if I so desired," Qvant said. "I shall put the next one through some paces to dispel your doubts about this. But the tribesmen who come to consult me are far from

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being the major figures in the culture of Rebirth Four, and even were they great heroes and leaders—which do not even exist in this culture—I could not change the cultural set, no matter what changes I made in the ways individual men think. The times are what they are; and the end is nigh."

"How long before the end?"

"Five years, perhaps; certainly no more."

Suddenly, Martels felt a fury of his own. "You make me ashamed to be a human being at all," he snarled, perforce in Qvant's voice. "Back in my time, people fought back! Now, here are your tribesmen, presumably intelligent and yet refusing to use the most obvious measures to protect themselves! And here are you, obviously the most intelligent and resourceful human mind in all of human history, able to take command of and help all the others, passively awaiting being picked to pieces by nothing but a flock of birds!"

As Martels' passion mounted, he was abruptly possessed by an image from his early youth. He had found a fallen robin chick in the scrawny back garden of the Doncaster house, thrown out of the nest before it was quite able to fly, and obviously injured—probably by one of the many starving cats of the neighborhood. Hoping to help it, he had picked it up, but it had died in his hands—and when he had put it down again, his hands were crawling with tiny black mites, like thousands of moving specks of black pepper. And it was to be *birds* that would supplant man? Bloody never, by God!

"You have no knowledge whatever of what it is you are talking about," Qvant said in his remotest voice. "Be silent now."

Thanks to the deception, Martels knew the depths of his own ignorance better even than Qvant did. But unlike Qvant, passivity was not in his nature; he had been fighting against circumstances all his life long, and was not about to stop now. Qvant was immensely his superior, in every imaginable way, but he would no more accede to Qvant's doom than he had to any past one.

Not that he said so, even had Qvant let him speak any further. What he wanted, chiefly, was not only to get the hell out of Qvant's brain—which Qvant obviously also would welcome—but back to his home century; and only in human techniques were there any hints of possible help in this direction. That malfunctioning perisher of a radio telescope had sent him up here, and that had been a human artifact; surely, by now, there must be some simpler way of reversing the effect.

Qvant had proven himself incapable of ridding himself of Martels simply as a nuisance in the present era, let alone of sending Martels back; and even did he know of such a way, it was bound to be more complicated than the simple exercise

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of throwing Martels out into the sad, dimming domain of the afterlife—an exercise which Qvant had tried, and failed to manage.

No, more human help was urgently necessary, and it would have to be sought from the tribesmen. They were, it was clear, scientifically innocent, but they were certainly preferable to the Birds, and besides, they had resources that Qvant did not. Most of these resources—such as their contact with their ancestors—were mysterious and problematical, but by the same token, they were outside Qvant's vast field of knowledge, and just *might* be applicable to the main problem.

And they were not savages. Martels had already realized that much from the few petitioners that he had seen. If these tribesmen were not the best samples of the men of Rebirth IV, what might the best be like? It was essential to find out, regardless of Qvant's opinion in the matter. Qvant had never seen them in their own environment; all his knowledge of their customs, behavior and capabilities had come from testimony, which is notoriously unreliable at its best, from a sampling which he himself thought unrepresentative, and from deduction. Nor did Qvant belong to this Rebirth himself; he might well be inherently incapable of understanding it.

Moreover, from his perspective, which was based upon the dim past, Martels thought he saw things in the petitioners which Qvant *was* incapable of seeing. Their intellects were still operative, upon a level which was beneath Qvant's notice; but to Martels, it could be highly significant for himself. Even a brown man who struck him initially as the veriest savage at one instant sometimes showed in the next some almost supernatural talent, or at the very least some fragment of knowledge which seemed to represent command of some entire field of science Martels' contemporaries had not even known existed. These things might be used. They *had* to be used.

But how? Suppose Martels were wholly in charge of the brain which went under the name of Qvant; how could he ask enough questions of the petitioners to find out anything he needed to know without arousing instant suspicion? After all, the petitioners were used to having the questions flow the other way. And even if he managed to do that, to in fact even masquerade successfully as Qvant himself, what could he tell the tribesmen that might provoke some action against the Birds, let alone advising them how to go about it?

At the best, he would only provoke bafflement and withdrawal. What he really needed to do was to get out of here and into the world, in some sort of a body, but that was plainly out of the question. His only option was to try to figure out some way of changing an age, and then hope that the age would find some way to rescue him.

Put that way, the whole project looked impossibly stupid. But what other way was there to put it?

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Necessarily, he went on as before, biding his time, listening, asking questions of Qvant when permitted, and occasionally getting answers. Sometimes, he got a new fact which made sense to him; mostly, not. And he began to feel, too, that the sleeplessness and the deprivation of all his senses but sight and hearing were more and more eroding his reason, despite the dubious and precarious access of his personality to the massive reasoning facilities of the Qvant brain. Even those facilities were somehow limited in a way he could not understand: Qvant had now several times mentioned having been deprived of a connection with a computer which would have enabled him to have performed even better. Was the computer in the museum, and Qvant's divorce from it simply a matter of a snapped input line which Qvant was unable to repair? Or did it lie far in the past, at the end of Rebirth III? Martels asked; but Qvant would not answer.

And in the meantime, for most of the time, Martels had to stare at the same spot on the far wall and listen to the same meaningless echoes.

The midsummer century wore on. A year went by. The petitioners became fewer and fewer. Even Qvant seemed to be suffering some kind of erosion, despite his interior resources: Into, indeed, some sort of somnambulistic reverie which was quite different from his previous state of constant interior speculation. Martels could no more overhear Qvant's thoughts than before, but their *tone* had changed; at the beginning, there had been an impression of leisurely, indeed almost sybaritic, but constant meditation and speculation, but now all that came through was a sort of drone, like a dull and repetitive dream which could not be gotten beyond a certain point, and from which it was impossible to awaken.

Martels had had such dreams himself; he had come to recognize them as a signal that he was on the verge of waking up, probably later in the day than he had wanted to; they were the mental equivalent of an almost self-awakening snore. Qvant, instead, seemed to be sinking deeper and deeper into them, which deprived the always-awake Martels even of Qvant's enigmatic conversation.

It had been a dull life to begin with, up here in 25,000 A.D. The boredom which had now set in with it was reaching depths which Martels had never imagined possible, and it looked like there was worse to come. He did not realize how much worse it was going to be until the day came when a tribesman came to petition Qvant—and Qvant did not answer, or even seem to notice.

Martels failed to seize the opportunity. He was entirely out of the habit of thinking fast. But when, perhaps six months later, the next petitioner appeared—halfway through the five years Qvant had predicted would end with the triumph of the Birds—Martels was ready:

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"Immortal Qvant, I pray the benison of your attention."

There was no answer from Qvant. The background drone of his repetitive daydream went on. Martels said softly: "You may obtrude yourself upon my attention."

Qvant still failed to interfere. The tribesman sidled into view.

"Immortal Qvant, I am Amra, of the tribe of Owlshield. After many generations, the volcano to the west of our territory is again showing signs of stirring in its sleep. Will it awaken to full anger? And if it does, what shall we do?"

Whatever Qvant might know about the geology of the area from which Amra had come, it was, as usual, inaccessible to Martels. All the same, it seemed only the simplest common sense not to hang around any long-quiescent volcano that was showing new signs of activity, whatever the specifics. He said:

"It will erupt in due course. I cannot predict how violent the first outbreak will be, but it would be well to change territories with all possible speed."

"Immortal Qvant perhaps has not heard recently of the situation of our poor tribe. We cannot migrate. Can you not give us some rite of propitiation?"

"It is impossible to propitiate a volcano," Martels said, though with rather less inner conviction than he would once have felt. "It is also true that I have received little news from your area for long and long. Explain why you cannot move."

He thought that he was beginning to capture Qvant's style of speech pretty well, and indeed the tribesman showed no sign of suspicion as yet. Amra said patiently:

"To the north is the territory of the tribe of Zhar-Pitzha, through which I passed on my way to your temple. Naturally, we cannot obtrude ourselves upon that. To the south is the eternal ice, and the devils of Terminus. And to the east, of course, there are always and always the Birds."

This, suddenly, was the very opportunity Martels had been waiting for. "Then, tribesman Amra, you must make alliance with the tribe of Zhar-Pitzha, and with weapons which I shall give you, make war upon the Birds!"

Amra's face was a study in consternation, but gradually his expression hardened into unreadability. He said:

"It pleases immortal Qvant to mock us in our desperation. We shall not return."

Amra bowed stiffly, and vanished from the unvarying field of view. When the echoes of his going had died completely in the hall, Martels found that Qvant—how long had he been listening?—had taken over control of the voice box, with a distant, cold and deadly laugh.

But all that the once-Supreme Autarch of Rebirth III actually said was:

"You see?"

Martels was grimly afraid that he did.

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5.

Nevertheless, Martels had picked up something else that was new, and now that Qvant was paying attention again—for however long that would last—Martels might as well try to pump him about it. He said:

"I thought it was worth trying. I was trained never to take any statement as a fact until I had tested it myself."

"And so was I. But that exacts no sympathy from me. These petitioners are my last contact with the human race—except for you, and you are worse than an anachronism, you are a living fossil—and I shall not allow you to frighten one of them away from me again."

"Compliments received, and I didn't think you would," Martels said. "I'm sorry myself that I scared him off. But I'm curious about some of the questions. From his references to the volcano and to 'the eternal ice,' I gather that his tribe is on the edge of Antarctica, in an area we used to call the Land of Fire."

"Quite correct."

"But what did he mean by 'the devils of Terminus'?"

"There is a small colony of men living in the south Polar mountains," Qvant said, with something very like hatred in his voice. "They are, or should still be, survivors of Rebirth Three, who were supposed to maintain a small, closed high-energy economy to power, tend and guard the computer which was designed to supplement my function. The tribesmen in the area call them devils because they rigidly bar entry from all the rest of the world, as they were instructed to do. But as I have told you, I no longer have access to that computer; and whether it is because the men of Terminus have degenerated and allowed it to break down, or whether they have deliberately cut me off from it, I have no way of telling."

So the jungle culture and the crumbling museum were not the end of the story after all! "Why don't you find out?" Martels demanded.

"How would you propose that I do that?"

"By taking control of the next petitioner, and marching him down there to take a look."

"One, because the route would take me through the country of the Birds. Two, because I cannot allow the brain to fall silent over the long period such a journey would take; by the time I returned—if I did—the petitioners would have abandoned me permanently."

"Rubbish," Martels said, giving the word a calculatedly sneering edge. "The loss of contact with that computer cripples you considerably, as you've told me over and over again. Getting back into contact with it had to be your first order of business, if it was at all possible. And if you could have done it, you would have. The present impasse suggests instead that you haven't got the hypnotic or projective powers to change the course of crawl of an insect, let alone a human being!"

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Astonishingly, Qvant did not seem to lose his temper, rather to Martel's disappointment.

"In fact I do not," he said, even more astonishingly, "if by 'me' you mean the rather fragile jugomagnetic field which is my personality, ego, psyche, call it what you will. If that were not the case, instances of newly dead souls instantly seizing possession of another living body would be commonplace. Instead, there are only scattered, unconfirmable rumors of a few such possessions. These powers are a function of the brain, of the organ itself—and pre-eminently, of this brain. A physical substrate and an energy source are both required to use them.

"As I promised, I shall demonstrate them at the next opportunity, not because allaying your doubts interests me in the slightest, but only to abate the nuisance of your clumsy attempts at experiment. *How* to use them I certainly shall not show you. Now, silence."

Silence perforce descended; but Qvant had already been loquacious enough, and that had not been the first occasion when Martels had been grateful for it. Perhaps Qvant, too, did occasionally feel the pressure of loneliness or boredom, after all. Or perhaps it was just that, not being limited by the necessity to breathe, nothing prevented him from spinning out a sentence as long as he wished, and these immense periods went on to becoming speeches, without Qvant's really being aware of it.

And now Martels had a new program—to get through to Terminus, somehow. Surely even a remnant of Rebirth III, with energy and technology at its disposal, offered more help for his peculiar problem than could all the tribesmen of Rebirth IV.

Qvant's last remark had to be interpreted as meaning that Qvant already suspected Martels of having formulated exactly such a program, just to be on the safe side. No doubt Qvant would have refused to teach Martels how to use the hypnotic and projective powers anyhow, simply to prevent him from undertaking any further agitation among the tribesmen toward a campaign against the Birds; but Martels had also just finished announcing in the plainest possible terms that had he been Qvant, he would have tried to reach Terminus, an announcement an intellect far feebler than Qvant's could not fail to have registered as something to guard against. And as a one-time Autarch, he would know a great deal better than Martels that it never paid to underestimate one's opponent. Even back in Martels' own time, it was a fundamental assumption of games theory that the enemy's most probable next move was also likely to be the best one.

Against this Martels had no recourse but his ability to mask his own thoughts from his brain-mate, and lay his plans as best he could; to reshuffle his cards, rethink his position, plot alternate courses, and hope for still more new data. Seen in this light, for example, the position-

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ing of the museum exhibits within his cone of vision took on new meaning: suddenly it had become important to assess their sizes and shapes, whether they were still mounted or had fallen over, whether they were intact or disjunct, and their exact distances from each other. The ones outside the cone didn't matter, except for the larger ones between the brain-case and the entrance to the hall, and these he mapped as precisely as possible from memory.

Beyond that, as always, he could only wait for the next petitioner, but this time he did not care how long that was delayed. The longer the interval, the more time he would have to consider every way in which his scheme might go wrong, how to deal with each possible failure-point, what other options he had if it failed completely all up and down the line, and finally, what his next moves were to be and his future might be like were it to succeed completely by first intention. Strategy and tactics had never been among his interests, but if there lay within him any latent talent for generalship at all, now was the time to develop it, with all deliberate speed.

As it happened, the next petitioner turned up only six months later—insofar as he could tell, for keeping a mental calendar of the invariable days was impossible, and in the seasonlessness of this midsummer century he was sure that he lost months as well. That, too, was just as well, for Martels had already reached the point where he had run out of alternatives and refinements, and was beginning to suspect that his major plot was starting to change from a plan of action into a wish-fulfillment day-dream.

Qvant was instantly alert, not at all to Martels' surprise. There was the usual ritual salutation and response. Then, after the visitor had come into sight and identified himself as Tlam of the tribe of Hawkburrow, the tribesman's eyes went glassy, he seemed to freeze solid, and not another word came from him. At the same time, Martels felt a curious lightness, a loss of pressure, almost a vacancy, as it Qvant were no longer present at all. Martels tried to speak, and found that he could.

"Qvant, are you doing that?"

"Yes," said the tribesman, in an eerie burlesque of Qvant's voice colored by his own. What was oddest about it, Martels found, was hearing Qvant speak without the usual blare of amplification. "Watch further."

The tribesman turned away and began to walk aimlessly among the monuments, occasionally making meaningless gestures before one or another of them. Martels found that he could also make his eyes track to follow. He said:

"Is he aware of what's going on?"

"No," the tribesman said, performing an absurdly solemn pirhouette. "I could make him aware, but I prefer not to alarm him. I shall return him to the same position from which he started, and when the

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episode is over, for him no time will have passed."

"I gather, then, that this is projection rather than hypnosis."

"Quite correct. Draw no hasty conclusions, however. You are powerless in any case, but should you make even the slightest attempt to take advantage of your present position, I should be back with you in the brain upon the instant—and thereafter will devote a sizable fraction of my attention to making you more miserable than you have ever been in your life."

Martels rather doubted that Qvant could much improve on the miseries of a Doncaster childhood, but he was more interested in noting that the statement and the threat contradicted each other. However, he made no comment. The wanderings of the possessed tribesman had already produced more footprints in the dust than had uncalculable decades of preceding visitors, and Martels was busily fitting them together with the tribesman's height and length of pace into the metrical frame of his map. It now seemed wholly unlikely that Qvant had any idea just how much new information he was providing by his somewhat vainglorious demonstration.

"Well," Martels said, "it doesn't look too different from effects of hypnosis well known in my time, except that there wasn't any preliminary routine. I would have thought that you were still in residence here, so to speak, and that the 'projection' consisted only of the use of some kind of line-of-sight microwave broadcast to override the poor fellow's own brain-waves."

"Quite possible, of course, but primitive and damaging," the tribesman said. "In a moment I shall show you the difference."

Qvant brought the tribesman back to exactly his original position. Without an instant's preparation or transition, Martels found himself looking at the brain-case from the outside.

As he had long suspected, it was transparent, and the brain inside it was as big as that of a dolphin; but he had spent many months preparing himself not to waste so much as a second in studying whatever it turned out to look like. Keeping his new body rigid and expressionless as if in shock, he changed the focus of his new eyes to seek out the tube, or tangle of tubes, which had to lead to the perfusion pump. It was there: One tube, and it looked heavily armored. Well, he had expected that, too.

Leaping one step back and three to the right, he swung up from the floor the club-like metal object he had long ago selected, and hurled it straight at the juncture of pipe and case.

The tribesman's jungle muscles, hunting aim, and speed of reflexes proved both true and far faster than anything Qvant could have anticipated. The heavy missile broke nothing, but a ghost of pain cried out in Martels' own mind at the impact.

Two leaps toward the entrance,

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another swooping grab at the floor, one leap back toward the case. As Martels swung the new and still heavier object high over his head, he felt Qvant's mind frantically trying to snatch his own back, but the new club—once probably a bus bar, rocker arm, limb of statuary, who knew what?—was already coming down with every dyne of force that Martels could demand from Tlam's arms and back. It hit the top edge of the brain-case with a noise like a pistol shot.

The case did not even scar, but all traces of Qvant's groping, powerful psyche blanked out. Tlam/Martels was already at a dead run toward the entrance—and Tlam proved to be able to run like a deer. Together they burst out into the glorious sunlight, and at once Martels relaxed all control. In obvious and predictable terror, Tlam plunged into the jungle, dodging and twisting along paths and trails Martels would never even have suspected were there; and even growing exhaustion did not stop him until night had almost fallen.

For Martels, the ride was as beautiful as the one train trip he had ever made through the Brenner Pass. At long last he could sense moisture again, smell greenness and mold and rot and vague floral odors, feel heat on his skin and the pounding of bare feet upon strewn earth and the proprioceptive flexing of muscles. He even enjoyed the lashing of branches, vines and thorns as they fled.

Now Tlam was examining the dense undergrowth all around him with swift but intense care, searching for hazards only he could know. Then he dropped to his hands and knees, crawled under a thicket of something with blade-shaped leaves and clusters of white berries, sobbed twice, curled into a ball and fell asleep.

It had worked. It had worked perfectly—flawlessly. Martels was out.

But for how long? There was no way of knowing that. The risks were still grave indeed, from the past as well as the future. Though he had deduced from what he thought had been good evidence that the reach of Qvant's hypnotic and projective powers could not be long, he did not know exactly how long they were, or, for that matter, how far away from the museum he now was. He had stunned Qvant, that much was inarguable, but he did not know for how long. Nor did he know how wide a divorce between Qvant's personality and his own would really become *regardless* of the distance between them. The dubious evidence for telepathy of his own century had suggested that it suffered *no* diminution with distance.

Suppose—improbable though it seemed—his crude attack had actually done some damage to the brain-case, or to the perfusion pump. . .enough damage so that the brain itself would eventually die? What would happen to Martels if Qvant died?

Over and over, he did not know. He would still need to exercise

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absolute vigilance against even the faintest of probes from Qvant. All he could be certain of at the moment was that at last he had a body. It could not exactly be described as his own, but at least it had given him back some freedom of motion.

Absolute vigilance. . .but what he had was a body, not a perfect perfusion pump, and he too was subject to its exhaustions. . . . Absolute vigilance. . . .

Martels fell asleep.

6.

Martels had strange dreams of falling down an endless tube lined with thorn-like fangs, ending at long last in the vague, somehow dreadful expectation that when he opened his eyes, what he would see would be nothing but a dusty floor, lumps of statuary, and a not very distant wall. But as he struggled toward wakefulness, there crept into his nostrils the scents of damp earth and vegetation and into his ears the rustling of a jungle, and he knew that that part of the nightmare, at least, was over.

He was at first surprised to find that his muscles did not ache after sleeping on the ground, but then he realized that they were not, after all, *his* muscles and that Tlam must have slept in this fashion hundreds of times in his life. Since the tribesman did not seem to be awake yet, Martels delayed opening his eyes, but instead searched his own mind for the presence of Qvant. Falling asleep had been criminal carelessness; yet how could he have prevented it? In any event, he had apparently been lucky. Of the ex-Autarch he could find not a trace.

What next? Qvant had said that the way to Antarctica and Terminus had to pass through the country of the Birds, but he could only have been talking about the most direct route—the one which would get him back to his own brain-case in the shortest possible time—for Amra, the petitioner who had appeared just before Tlam, had come from a territory bordering on Antarctica and had reached the museum without having had to go through Bird country. That suggested that Amra's territory could not be unconscionably far away from the museum, for surely the tribesmen would have no means nor any desire to cross whole continents, let alone oceans, for the dubious benefits of Qvant's cryptic advice. That they did not place a very high value upon what Qvant told them had already been evidenced by how seldom they asked for it, and what little real good it seemed to do them in coping with the world they had to live in.

Qvant had also confirmed Martels' guess that Amra's turf lay somewhere near what used to be called Tierra del Fuego, which in turn meant that the museum had to be situated somewhere in whatever was left of what used to be South America—and that there was now a land bridge, or at least a stretch of easily navigable water, between that once-island chain and the ice-bound continent

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itself. All well and good; then the obvious first step was passively to allow Tlam to go back to his own tribe. Even if that lay at the worst due North of the museum, Martels was so completely ignorant of tribal geography that there seemed to be no other way for him to find out even so much as which way due South lay. And, perhaps just as importantly, which way was due East, which he already knew from the testimony of Amra to be Bird country.

There might be much else to learn along the way, too—but that raised another problem. Martels now had not only a body, but a brain; but judging by his experience while semiliving with Qvant, Martels would have no access to the specialized knowledge within that brain without making himself known to its owner, and then only with that owner's consent.

Thus far, apparently, Tlam did not know that he was tenanted at all; he had simply come to ask Qvant a question, had instead committed a series of inexplicable acts of violence against the demigod, and had fled as much in terror of himself as of the oracle. Martels, in revealing himself, might pose as an ancestor, or even as Qvant; and he already knew that he could resume control of Tlam's body whenever he needed to—

No, that wouldn't do. It would simply overwhelm Tlam, if it did not also panic him again, and there was probably just as much to be learned by continuing to go along for the ride. Best to give Tlam his head for as long as possible; the time when Martels would have to take it away from him would probably come all too soon, in any event.

Tlam stirred, and his eyes opened, admitting an extreme close-up of stems, creepers, toadstools, and things that looked like miniature cypress trees. The tribesman seemed to come awake almost instantaneously. In lieu of stretching, he flexed his whole body, so sinuously that he did not shake a single leaf, and then peered out through the shrubbery. Apparently he saw nothing to alarm him, for he clambered to his feet without any further attempt at caution and proceeded to make a breakfast upon the clustered white berries. Their taste and texture most closely resembled boiled hominy grits which had been pickled for ten years in salted white wine through which sulfur dioxide had been bubbled, but it had been so long since Martels had tasted anything at all that to him they seemed delicious. Only a few meters away, Tlam found a huge blue chalice of a flower which was filled with dew or rain water, warm and slightly sweet, but quenching nevertheless. Then, once more, Tlam began to run.

The tribesman kept moving steadily all the rest of the day. He paced himself like a cross-country horse: Run, trot, walk; run, trot, walk; run, trot, walk, with breaks of about ten minutes in every hour for a rest, a drink, a sticky fruit or a pungent fungus. Though his route

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was necessarily very twisty, Martels was able to notice toward the afternoon that the filtered green-gold sunlight was fading to the left. A bonus! They were going north, at least roughly.

Not long before dusk, they came to an immense foaming torrent of a river which to Martels' eyes looked absolutely impassable, but it did not deter Tlam at all. He simply took to the trees, through which the river tunneled. Never before having seen a tropical rain forest or even having read anything about one, Martels was astonished to discover that its treetops, entangled with thousands of vines, formed a separate and continuous world, as though the Earth had acquired a second surface, or some primitive vision of heaven had been lowered to within reach of the living. It was a heaven in which snakes masqueraded as vines, frogs lived and bred in the ponds formed by the corollas of immense flowers, monkey-like creatures almost as small as rats threw nuts with stinging accuracy and force, and green eyes in whose depths lurked madness sometimes peered out of darknesses which should have been in caves rather than in midair. But Tlam swarmed through it as though it were for him as natural a habitat as the jungle floor below, and by the time he touched ground again, the river was so far behind that it could not even be heard.

They spent that night on a sort of natural platform halfway up what proved in the morning to be a tree as contorted as an apple tree, but which bore fruits like walnuts. These Tlam casually crushed open in one hand two at a time, reminding Martels incongruously of an Italian dirty joke twenty-three thousand years old. After this breakfast, Tlam dropped to the ground and resumed their journey, but he was no longer running; he seemed to be in familiar territory and nearing his goal.

And then they were there. Before Martels' eyes lay what had to be a village, but like none he had ever seen before, even in pictures. Though the clearing which it occupied was quite large, a quincunx of ancient trees had been left standing in it, so that it was still covered by the densely matted roof of the rain forest. Placed regularly upon the open ground were heavy wooden shields, each of which was perhaps fifteen feet in diameter, face down and with their edges held up no more than six inches from the soil by thick wooden wedges which had been driven first through their rims and then solidly into the earth. The rims were circular, but the curvature of the shields, the mathematical part of Martels' mind noted automatically, was so nearly flat that were one to try to derive a value for *pi* over the convexity of one of them, that value would probably come out to be exactly three point zero, just as the Babylonians had measured it.

Vines and lianas had been woven all over these very slightly bulging surfaces, and every strand bore thorns ranging from about the size of

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blackberry prickles to formidable spears nearly a foot long. Wherever possible, too, turf was exposed under the network, from which grew things like mutated nettles. The whole arrangement, from ground to jungle roof, was obviously a defense against attack from the air. Had Martels been in any doubt about that, it would have been dispelled at once by the bird—each one some sort of hawk, from chick to monster—impaled upon the central spike of each shield, and by the stains at the tips of all the longer thorns, some of which were obviously dried blood, but the majority of different colors strongly suggesting painted poisons.

Considering what all this implied about the Birds, Martels was suddenly none too sure but that he would have been happier back in the brain-case. There, Qvant's comment that the Birds were dangerously intelligent had been only an abstraction. Here there was living evidence that Tlam's tribe of Hawkburrow expected at any time a concerted attempt by Birds of all sizes—not just hawks—and to be unshelled like a clam, or uncapped like a beer bottle.

There seemed to be nobody about, but Tlam paused at the edge of the clearing and gave a great shout. After what seemed to be a very long while, there was a scrambling noise, a semielliptical bite out of the edge of the nearest hut-lid lifted cautiously like the door to the tunnel of a trap-door spider, and a face peered upward.

"Welcome alive, Tlam," the face said in a high voice, its eyes squinted against the light, though its bald head was still in shadow. The body that belonged to the head wriggled out into the clearing and stood up. The villager turned out to be a sturdy young woman, also naked, but also clean; evidently the floors of the burrows were covered, not bare earth.

Tlam said, "My thanks go with yours. I must see the Elders at once."

The girl looked dubious. "They are sleeping after a night hunt. Is the answer of the Qvant so grave that it cannot wait?"

The Qvant. So it was a title. The discovery seemed to be of no use—but there was no predicting when or if it might be.

"The matter is very grave, and will not keep. Rouse them. That is my order."

"Very well." The girl dropped to her hands and knees and slithered back into the hut again, not without a display that reminded Martels that he once more had a body—and had always had pretty bad luck with women. He forced his thoughts back onto the main track. The girl's instant obedience suggested that Tlam swung some weight here—might, perhaps, even be some kind of chieftain. That could be helpful. Or did the tribesmen keep slaves? That had never been mentioned, and it seemed extremely unlikely; the jungle would have made escape too easy.

While Tlam waited, apparently at

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ease, Martels wondered also about the night hunting. Slinking about with one's eyes upon the ground, in the dark, unable to see any stooping Birds, struck him as an extremely bad idea; and Tlam had always carefully taken cover at dusk during their journey here. To be sure, almost all the birds of his own time that he knew anything about slept at night, but there had been nocturnal raptors, too; and one of Qvant's (the Qvant's) petitioners had mentioned owls. What a 250th Century owl might be like was not a pleasant thought. But the fact that Tlam had not known that the Elders would be sleeping argued that night hunting was only an occasional and perhaps rare undertaking.

The girl appeared again, partway, and beckoned, then disappeared. Tlam crouched down promptly and crawled through the door.

The bowl under the shield proved to be surprisingly deep and roomy, and as Martels had guessed, was carpeted, with what seemed to be stitched-together hides, some with the fur still on them. They had been well tanned, for the only odor was the faintest of human pungencies, like that of slight and recent sweat. There was no light but the filtered daylight which leaked under the shield, but that was more than adequate—rather dim, but even, and not at all gloomy.

Seven men were in the process of arranging themselves into a circle, and settling themselves into something very like the lotus position of Yoga. Despite their collective title, they did not look to be very much older than Tlam himself, as had probably been predictable among people whose lifepans were short—though not, as far as Martels could judge, either nasty or brutish. Though they had been only just awakened, all seven looked completely alert, though several also looked annoyed.

Tlam went to the center of the circle and sat down himself. From this station, all the Elders were looking down upon him. Chief or not, he seemed to find this normal.

"What was the Qvant's answer, Chief Tlam?" one of them said, without preamble, "and why is it so urgent?"

"There was no answer, Elders, nor did I ever ask the question. The moment after I was allowed to obtrude myself upon the Qvant's attention, I found myself attacking him."

There was a murmur of astonishment.

"Attacking him?" the first speaker said. "Impossible! How?"

"With two objects from the museum floor, which I used as clubs."

"But—why?" another speaker said.

"I do not know. It simply happened, as though I were possessed."

"That is no excuse. No one is ever unwillingly possessed. Did the Qvant retaliate?"

"Not in any way," Tlam said.

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"Nor, of course, did I do him any harm. As soon as I realized what was happening, I ran—and he did not even attempt to prevent me."

"Of course you did the Qvant no harm," the second speaker said, with heavy emphasis. "But what harm you have done the tribe may be irrevocable. We do not know what would happen to us, were the Qvant to send his powers or spirit to seek us out! Even if he does not, we cannot petition him again while you live!"

"That is also my belief," Tlam said, with a serenity surprising until Martels remembered how death-oriented these people were. "And that is why I hurried to submit myself to your sentence."

Tlam bowed his head, and after that there was a silence which went on and on and on. Martels had unthinkingly anticipated some sort of discussion among the Elders, but instead not a word was spoken. Were they communing with their ancestors. That seemed to be the only likely answer. Martels would have liked to have looked around for the girl, but evidently she had remained by the entrance, and no help could be expected from her anyhow. It had been only an impulse—Martels was life-oriented.

At long last, the first of the Elders said, in a remote and singsong voice.

"Chief Tlam, will you have blade or Bird, execution or exile?"

It was purely a ritual question, and in this culture could have only one answer. Instantly, Martels moved in on Tlam and suppressed it. He did not attempt to dictate another answer, but simply paralyzed Tlam's speech center entirely, as the Qvant had so often done Martels'. Distantly, he could sense Tlam's shock as the tribesman again felt himself possessed by something unknown and alien at a crucial moment.

There was another long silence, though not quite so long as the first. Finally, the first Elder said, in a voice dripping with contempt:

"How could we have been so mistaken as to have made *you* a chief? Our ancestors grow feeble, and our judgment as well. Your courage is less than a boy's. Let it be exile, then. . .and the memory, as the Birds tear you to pieces, that you were the first of all our tribe to fear the mercy of the blade. The punishment is far graver than the crime—but you yourself chose it."

In a moment of pity which he knew might be foolhardy, Martels promptly released Tlam to see if the deposed chieftain would enter any plea. But Tlam was obviously too shooked, humiliated and completely confused to say anything, even had he wanted to. He crawled silently up the slope and out of the burrow. As he raised the thorn-edged flap, the girl spat on the back of his neck.

After that, he lacked the dignity even to hold the door up. The thorns raked him as it fell; he did not seem to care, or even to notice.

Standing, he looked about the clearing, blinking, tense, uncertain. It was plain that the situation was unprecedented—something that he

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had never even thought about in all his life. Under these customs, no other tribe would accept him; he could not live long off the land by himself; he had inexplicably opted for exile—and had no place to go.

Should Martels take him over now? Martels would need the tribesman's instinctive knowledge, and experience, of how to live in the jungle; on the other hand, given his head, and given his attitudes, Tlam might well commit hara-kiri, or at the best lapse into suicidal apathy. It was Hobson's choice.

Tlam himself decided against remaining any longer to await and face the contumely of the awakening village. He drifted despondently off into the bush. There arose in Martels' mind the verses of Goethe about the misanthrope which Brahms had set in the *Alto Rhapsody:* "The grasses rise behind him; the waste receives him." But it was not Tlam who had rejected men, but they him, and it was entirely Martels' fault.

And there was no help for it. At this point, to a vocal cry of horror and despair from Tlam, Martels set him to marching south, towards Terminus. . .and the country of the Birds.

At long last, the real journey had begun.

7

As they moved south, Tlam gradually seemed to become more fatalistic, so that Martels was warned by a sudden though slight increase in the tribesman's muscle tone when they actually crossed into what Tlam considered to be Bird country. But for several days thereafter, they saw no birds at all; the pattern of marching, concealment, sleep, foraging and marching again settled back into a routine, which Martels allowed Tlam to dictate. No one observing the tribesman from outside could have guessed the dialectical tension between Tlam's dulling despair and Martels' increasing urgency which was the unspoken central fact of their inner life.

Then they saw a bird. It was a little, dun-colored creature, disarmingly like a sparrow, but Tlam went into instant tetany at the sight, like a rabbit freezing at the sight of a snake. The bird in turn bobbed up and down, its claws clinging to the outermost end of a low branch, cocking its head and flirting its feathers, and occasionally interrupting its regard to groom itself. Its gaze seemed to be virtually mindless, and after a while it gave an indifferent chirrup and shot up and away into the dimness of the rain forest like a feathered bullet.

It was hard to believe that such a thing could be dangerous, but cancer viruses also came in small packages. Tlam remained frozen for several minutes after it had vanished, and thereafter moved with still greater caution, constantly shooting glances from side to side and up and down with a quickness which was in itself almost birdlike. Nor was he wrong; for the next day they saw three more

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of the sparrow-like birds, and the next day, five. And the morning after that, they emerged from their sleeping burrow to find a smoke-black thing like an enormous crow looking down upon them, just out of club's reach, its head bent, its neck extended until it seemed almost snake-like, its eyes glassy and unblinking.

Memories of *Macbeth* and Edgar Allan Poe would have made Martels shudder had he been in his right body, but Tlam was still nominally in charge, and he froze again. For very disparate reasons, neither of the two minds was surprised when the bird's beak parted, its throat ruffled and pulsed, and it said in a voice like fingernails on a blackboard:

"Go home."

"I have no home any more," Tlam said hopelessly. "I am an outcast from my tribe, and all the tribes of men."

"Go home," the sooty thing said. "I lust for your eyes. The King has promised them to me if you do not go."

Curiously, this did not seem to frighten Tlam any further; perhaps it was a standard threat—or perhaps, if he had never been here before, he had already reached the limits of his terror. A line from James Thompson's *The City of Dreadful Night* came back to Martels: "No hope can have no fear." The tribesman said only:

"I cannot."

"The King hears."

"So be it."

"Go home."

"I cannot."

This exchange was threatening to turn into a ritual, and certainly was producing no more information. In growing impatience, Martels broke through Tlam's paralysis and set him to walking again, though not without allowing the tribesman substantial residues of his caution. The bird did not move, let alone follow, but somehow Martels could feel its unblinking gaze drilling into the back of Tlam's neck.

After a while, however, Martels began to feel a surprising resistance to further travel—surprising not only because he had assumed that Tlam would have been as glad to get away from the bird as he was, but for the unexpected strength of it. With some interest, he released control almost completely; if there was a reason for this much resistance, it was probably urgent for Martels to know what it was.

Tlam backed carefully into a bower where there was a huge tree at his back and a great deal of cover on all sides, plus a good deal of free space in front and above. His movements were more tentative than ever, as though he were suspicious of the degree of his new freedom, and expected to be taken over again at any moment. Martels let him settle himself to his own satisfaction, without evincing any interference whatsoever.

For a while, the tribesman simply rested; but at last, he said in an almost voiceless whisper:

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"Immortal Qvant, or spirit sent by Qvant, hear me."

Martels said nothing, though he had a deep, uneasy feeling that he ought to respond, if only to encourage the tribesman to continue. But apparently silence was no more than Tlam had expected. After repeating the invocation, he went on:

"I know not at all why you have had me driven from your presence, or caused me my exile from my tribe. Still less do I know why you have harried me like a sacrifice deep into the country of the Birds. I have done nothing to earn your hatred; my very madness in your temple can have been caused by none other than your immortal self, for surely my ancestors would never have countenanced it. Tell me what you want. What have I done, that I should die for it? What is the doom that you have put upon me? How may I fulfill your wishes? Answer, immortal Qvant, answer, answer!"

The speech was not without dignity, but there was no answer that Martels could have given him, nor any hope for justice. In the light of Martels' own purposes, Tlam was even closer to being a sacrificial animal than the tribesman suspected himself to be. Neither of them had much future, but nothing that Martels could explain would make it seem brighter to Tlam. He could do nothing but remain silent.

"Immortal Qvant, answer me, answer me! What shall I do that you should be assuaged? Soon the Birds will hear my mind, and perhaps yours—or that of your creature. Then their King will have me, and he will question me to the death. What answers shall I give? What is the purpose of this possession? Must I die unknowing? I have not, I have not, not done anything to die for!"

That cry had been old when it had been torn from the throats of the *hoi polloi* at the sack of Syracuse. There was an answer—*You were born*—but there would be no point in offering it. It was far too fatalistic to advance Martels' own quest one step, let alone to satisfy Tlam; better not even to confirm, at this juncture, Tlam's well-founded suspicion that he was possessed, by so much as one word.

Some patterns, however, never change. Tlam cried out, almost at full voice, for the ritual third time:

"Immortal Qvant, or spirit sent by Qvant, grant me your attention! Answer me, your petitioner!"

Martels continued to stand mute . . .but there was a slow stirring at the back of his brain, like the sensation of awakening slowly from a repetitious dream; and then his lips stirred, his chest rose, and his heart sank as he heard himself saying in an all too familiar voice:

"I am with you, tribesman. . .and your demon is not of my sending. Press forward to its urging, nevertheless, and fear not the Birds. Our hour is yet to come."

The triple-minded man rose, and moved somnambulistically southward once more.

8.

Martels did not need to have been

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an ornithologist to know that the formation-flying, the migrations and the homing instincts of birds had always been a mystery. His father, like many bottom-class Englishmen of his time, had raced pigeons, and had occasionally eked out his other income from the football pools, the darts, shove ha'penny, the betting shop (more politely known as "turf accountants") and (when all else failed) the Labour Exchange by selling a favorite bird to another fancier. Back then, there had been a good many fanciful theories advanced to account for why homing birds behaved as they did, one of the most fanciful of which had been that the creatures had the equivalent of iron filings in their inner ears—or in their hollow bones—which enabled them to navigate directly along the Earth's magnetic lines of force.

That they were telepathic had naturally been one of the first of all of the hypotheses—and now, contrary to all of Martel's prior inclinations, he was prepared to believe that this was in fact the most tenable explanation. He did not like it any the better for its having been forced upon him.

Qvant did not speak again. The triple-minded creature that was Tlam forged steadily southward, without need of further urging from Martels, and under his own guidance, as before, as to how to handle the minutiae of the journey. Martels, withdrawn, continued to speculate.

Of course one would have to begin by throwing out all the Twentieth Century observations on telepathy as resting solely upon testimony; every time a Rhine or a Soal took it into the laboratory, it evaporated into the clouds of these investigators' willingness to call unfavorable results by some other name. Direct contact with it, here, now, seemed to indicate that it was in fact subject to the inverse-square law, or in other words, that it diminished with distance; and if birds—even the bird-brained birds of Martels' own time—had always been able to use it, then it had probably started as nothing more than a sort of riding light by which like minds and like intentions could be detected.

Such an ability would naturally be selected *out* in sentient creatures, since from the evolutionary point of view, intelligence would serve the same functions far better. That would leave behind only the maddening vestiges—a sort of vermiform appendix of the mind—which had so persistently disappointed the most sincere occultists from Newton onward. Maybe mob psychology was another such vestige; if so, that was definitely *anti*-survival and would be selected out even faster. Even for the Birds of this century, it did not have much future—but Martels was going to have to deal with them in the present.

Another question: How was Qvant tied to Tlam and Martels? Was he inside Tlam's skull, as Martels now seemed to be? Or was he still back in the museum inside the assaulted

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brain-case, with only a tenuous spiritual tentacle stretched out to connect him to the tribesman, perhaps through Martels' own intermediation? By Martels' hypothesis, that ought to be impossible, but the men of Rebirth III might quite easily have bred telepathy back into the human line, as his own time had recreated the aurochs, and as Qvant's people had made Qvant the bearer of hypnotic and projective powers. Qvant had mentioned something called general juganity, "at which the Birds are instinctively expert". What *were* the laws underlying a phenomenon of this kind? Qvant doubtless knew them, but they were impossible to deduce from scratch, at least by anyone who had been so complete a skeptic as Martels until he had been plunged into this era, minus some twenty centuries of intermediate thought on the subject.

Whatever those laws were, they seemed to confuse the Birds. As the more and more neglected body of the triply inhabited man plunged on through the thorns, vines and fronds of the midsummer century, the Birds gathered about it, pecking, darting, quarreling and slashing, yet never making the fatal final attack that Martels—and, clearly, Tlam—expected at any moment. He felt like a beef steer being driven down the slaughtering chute, unable to understand what was going on, certain only that creatures whom he had regarded as not much more than minor nuisances had suddenly and mysteriously turned malevolent.

Qvant did not help, nor even surface, but a faint and complacent hum, like a maintenance turnover, somewhere near Tlam's cerebellum or even farther down into the brain stem near the rhinencephalon warned Martels that he was still there, in whatever mode. That was helpful, in a way, in that he did not interfere with Martels' imposed *Drang nach Suden;* yet at the same time, Martels was sure that the furies of tentative rage with which the Birds now surrounded them like a storm of feathers had something to do with the Qvant's immanence. After all, had not the Qvant himself said that he was a symbol of everything the Birds most hated and feared? Martels was sure by now that a single man occupied only by his own mind would have been shredded to bits out of hand long before he had seen the first raven-like creature; the triple being was being spared in part because the Birds sensed something peculiar about it which they both hated and needed to know—but could not tell by direct telepathy anything more than that.

Thus it was that he came at long last to the Tower on Human Legs.

He did not know the overall size of the museum in which he had awakened into this world, but some sort of leakage between the Qvant's mind and his own told him that the Tower was considerably bigger. It had been erected in a natural clearing so large as to be almost a meadow, and filled most of it with its base, all of it with its shadow.

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The three columns which held it aloft were, of course, its most striking feature. Originally they had been very ancient trees, each of which might have been made the core of a respectable medieval tower in itself, with a spiral staircase carved last of all out of the wood, like several such Martels had seen in Paris. They formed instead the points of a nearly equilateral triangle, with portions of their thick roots above the ground. Perhaps it had been these roots which had originally suggested the conceit of shaping the pillars in the form of human feet and legs, toes outward, around which the Tower proper was draped like an exagger-

the Birds had originally only girdled the trees to stop their growth, and in flensing away the bark had accidentally uncovered a pre-existing resemblance, which was heightened by the ivory whiteness of the wood underneath. The work itself had evidently been done with something like a drawknife, for Martels could see the flatness of the long strokes it produced—a technique which had been cunningly used to accentuate the flatness of the human shin.

The Tower proper had been fastened around the trees as a series of drums of equal size, whose sides were crazy quilts of animal hides beautifully stitched together with the finest of leather cords. The hides themselves appeared at first to have been chosen at random, but seen from a distance they flowed upward from the meadow in long twisting lines which gathered together toward the top of the structure like a stylized candle-flame. Its point, however, was not visible from where Martels stood; more than likely, the total effect could be seen to best advantage from the air.

Even the main body was not easy to see amidst the clouds of birds which constantly surrounded it, however, nor was Martels given any chance to study it in detail. He was chevied under the immense tripod to its exact center, where there proved to be a slender central pole around which jutted a spiral of ascending pegs. Undignified, needle-like thrusts into Tlam's rump indicated that he was to climb these.

The pegs had not been cut or spaced for men, and since it got steadily gloomier as he climbed, for a while his attention was totally centered on keeping himself from falling. Eventually, he ran out of breath, and had to sit down upon the next peg, which looked to be thick enough to bear his weight, with assists from feet and hands on the two adjacent. Breathing heavily, he clung to the pole and pegs and looked aloft.

Above him there first seemed to be a barrel-shaped universe extending into infinity and pricked along its sides with the most intense of little stars, growing confusingly brighter with distance. Strange nebular masses occasionally occluded them, and there was a good deal of twinkling. Bars of light crisscrossed it, some of them being shed by the brighter

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stars, others looking more solid, and set at different angles, as though this universe had a visible metrical frame. The twittering, fluttering and squawking of the birds outside was here muted into a composite thrilling, an audible music of the spheres, which was shaken occasionally by some broader shudder or larger pinions.

After a while, his eyes became accustomed to the gloom, and he began to see what was really to be seen. It was not much less remarkable than his first impression, and the two tended to change places abruptly, like an optical illusion. The stars were meeting places of the corners of hides; the shafts were sometimes true sunbeams, as direct and intense as laser light; and more seldom were the radial ribs of the drums. These ribs, plus the increasingly larger pegs of the ridgepole he was clinging to, provided an ascending series of perches upon which sat great dusky raptor-like figures in apparent somnolence except for an occasional shifting of claws or flutter of wing or drooping tail. Here and there, eyes like half-moons tilted and looked down upon him, filming and closing, then opening again. There was a whole hierarchy of Birds inside this tower—and Martels was in no doubt at all as to who was at the top. This universe was theirs, every mote and beam.

His honor guard was gone now, and except for the half-moons, nobody seemed to be paying close attention to him. He looked down. The dun disc of the floor under the tower looked like the far end of a tunnel in this artificial perspective, but the unique experience of having fallen down the barrel of a telescope gave him reason to believe that it was a drop he could survive, particularly if he began by swinging down around the pegs again, monkey-like. And once he hit the earth, he could probably scuttle flat along the meadow floor back into the jungle faster than the birds could realize that he might. It seemed highly unlikely that any man had been drawn this far into the Lobachevskian universe of the Birds, or at least not for decades, and besides, they were probably not equipped to appreciate how rapidly a man can revert to his quadruped ancestors when driven by the need. Their own ancestors were bipedal dinosaurs even farther in the past.

But he would have to be quick. More and more half-moons were regarding him now, and he felt an obsessive pressure radiating out from the center of his mind, as though those eyes were demanding his identity. Hitching forward until most of his weight was on his feet, he shifted and prepared for the long swinging drop through the black, feathery continuum—

In midswing the vertical twinkling tunnel and the disc of dirt below it blacked out entirely, and for the second time Martels found himself in the midst of a mortal struggle with the Qvant. The battle was wordless.

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which gave Qvant enough of an advantage to leave Martels no attention left over for his immediate environment. The riptides of demanding hatred surged through a featureless, locationless chaos in which the only real things were the combatants. They were at it over kalpas of eternity, eternities of seconds, neither knowing which was hammer and which was anvil, against no backdrop but a distant scream which might have been Tlam's—

They were still fighting when the tribesman's body hit the ground.

9.

A deep, racking ache awoke Martels out of a sleep which he would infinitely have preferred to have been endless. He groaned and stretched tentatively. He had hit the bottom of the telescope, evidently; but why was it made of drumhide rather than fused quartz? But radio telescopes do not have quartz mirrors, either; why shouldn't there be drumhide instead? Whatever the reason, he could sense it flexing tautly as he moved, giving off a deep *ronronner*, like a cheetah purring in French. Far echoes answered it, as if from below.

There was light on his eyelids, but he did not open them yet, listening instead inside his own psyche for an unknown enemy. Qvant? The name brought everything back and he was instantly tense.

At the moment, there seemed to be no trace of the Autarch. A faint edge of alertness suggested that Tlam was also awake, and perhaps had been awake for some time. Well, that figured; the first *persona* to awaken from the shock of a long fall would be the tribesman, and the Qvant, who had not been in a body for some centuries, would be the last. That was a point to remember: Against the Qvant, physical pain was an ally.

Martels heaved himself up on one elbow and looked about. He seemed now to be in the topmost drum of the tower, one which was smaller than all the others and hence had been invisible from the ground. It had no central pole, only the radial ribs and circular members of the drum itself. Furthermore, it was open upon three sides, by panels which had simply been left off the drum entirely. The high chamber was uncomfortably cold, which made him realize that from having had no sensations at all in the brain-case he had gone to being uncomfortably hot all the time up to now. Didn't this damn century have anything but extremes?

He raised himself creakily to a sitting position and looked upward. By now he had realized that this direction, which nobody pays much attention to in normal life, was what counted in the country of the Birds. It could have been deduced, but getting into the habit was something else; like an Englishman who knows that Americans drive on the wrong side of the road, yet does not connect it with looking left instead of right when he steps off a curb.

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Sure enough. At the topmost reaches of this cylindrical hat there was another perch, surrounded by cruel, thorny, occasionally shifting claws; then a long, greasy, feathery breast of blue-tinged black; and at last, sagging, narrow, reptilian shoulders and a long narrow beak topped by very narrow eyes. The thing looked like a gigantic vulture, but there were rings upon its eight scaly fingers, the nails of each central claw had been filed to a razor edge, and over its breastbone was imbedded a gleaming metallic sigil enamaled with something very like the Taoist sign of Yang and Yin, the oldest symbol in history. The monster did not seem to be asleep; on the other hand, it did not seem to be watching him. It was just, terrifically and potently, *there.*

After Martels reached the nearest opening in the drum, he could see why. The drop from there to the setback was only about twenty feet, but the setback too had a drumhead floor, which he would plunge right through; and from there, it was perhaps more than a thousand feet down through the cylindrical universe to the meadow.

The view from here over the forest would have been beautiful, had he been in any position to appreciate it, but it was contaminated by more birds of all sizes at all possible distances, wheeling and wheeling. Clearly, as a captive he was something special.

Restlessly, he crossed to the next window. These openings seemed to be placed alternately to the legs on the ground. Essentially, the view had not changed here; he moved on to the last.

Still the same. No, not quite. The light was different. And more than that: There did not seem to be any horizon on this side; it was masked by what seemed to be almost a wall of mist.

A stab of pure excitement shot through him, despite his best attempts to keep it from Tlam and from the problematical presence of the Qvant. His astronomical training, his now-lengthening experience with Tlam of jungle orientation, and even a vague memory of Poe's *Arthur Gordon Pym* combined like so many puzzle pieces.

He was looking due south over the Drake Passage toward the Palmer Peninsula of Antarctica. . .or what had been those other lands and seas in his time.

His mind reeling with unfocused desire, he clung to the edge of the ribs and sat down, suddenly aware in addition that his borrowed body was weak with hunger and accident, sticky and reeking with its passage through a thousand jungle saps and resins, aching with effort and parched with thirst. Above him, the enormous vulture-like creature brooded, semisomnolent but obviously alert enough. There lay the Promised Land, but as far as Martels was concerned, the curtain of rising mist which marked the beginning of the icecap might as well be the layer of ice crystals which delimited the atmosphere of Mars.

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Had great gull-like birds flown toward him out of the mist crying *Tekeli-li*, he could not have been more sure. . .or more helpless.

Behind the knowledge arose a faint current of mockery. The Qvant was awake.

One of the wheeling birds was approaching the tower; now that he noticed it, he realized that he had been subconsciously watching its approach for some minutes. Suddenly it was coming at him like a cannon ball. He pulled away from the open panel, his back against the hides.

There was a thrashing of pinions above him as his guard moved to a higher perch. Another rush of feathers and disturbed air, and its place was taken by a scarlet and gold effigy nearly as tall as he was. It wore no insignia whatsoever, but none were needed; its plumage, its bearing, its very shape—a combination which suggested both the eagle and the owl, without closely resembling either—told him that this was the King.

The great Bird sat silently regarding him for several minutes, its eyes occasionally filming. At last the hooked beak parted, and a deep, harsh voice said:

"Who are you?"

Martels wondered if the King had any suspicion of how difficult that apparently routine question would be to answer. Under the circumstances, he felt that it would be best to let Tlam do the talking, provided that the Qvant did not interfere. But the Qvant showed no present disposition to intervene.

"I am nothing, Lord King. Once I was a man of the tribe of Hawkburrow, but I have been cast out as one demon-ridden."

"We see what you are," the King said. "It is the nature of your inner self we seek to understand. You are three in one, like this the footstool of our world. The tribesman is beneath our notice; but he is a son of Man. Who are these others?"

Martels had a flash of inspiration. He said in his own voice: "I, Lord King, am the tribesman's ancestor, far removed."

The King blinked, once. "We hear you, Father," he said surprisingly. "Yet we sense that though what you say is the truth, it is not the whole truth. We feel indistinctly in you the one human being in all our world who most threatens our coming triumph. For this alone we should kill you, and we shall—but what is this third spirit which we would so loose upon that world?"

Martels was almost as taken aback by the King's candidness as by the impossibility of understanding what he was saying. In that moment of indecision, the Qvant's answer rushed smoothly forward with all the power of his ancient and continuous sentience, as implacable as a locomotive about to cut down a buttercup between the ties. Something monstrously evil about the formed yet unreadable thought evidently reached Tlam even faster than it did Martels. Together they clung about it, trying to close it in, like a weak and belated conscience.

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Tlam's unexpected help seemed to be only about as effective as would have been the interposition of an additional buttercup before the onrushing engine. The Qvant's voice said evenly, "I, Lord King, am the Qvant of Rebirth Three; and I spit upon your spittleless world and all its little lice."

This was certainly a speech Martels would have prevented the Qvant from making, had he been able; yet the Qvant's mind was full of sullen rage as he fell back, as if defeated, leaving Martels nearly sure that it had not been the evil thing the Autarch had prepared to say.

The King bent his huge head and turned it slightly to one side.

"Why would the Qvant so seek to provoke us?" he grated. "Here again is truth, yet not the whole truth. Were it wholly so, we should by no means release that ageless spirit into our future; but why does it go about in flesh, and further cumbered with lesser selves? Why this threefold disunity? Whom among you shall answer?"

Under any other circumstances, Martels might have opted for the whole truth, in the hope of proving his harmlessness; but the Bird King's own mind did not seem to be sufficiently analytical to understand the answer, even—which was doubtful—had he had enough historical background. The Qvant, in turn, was apparently still sulking; and as for Tlam, though he was now to be regarded as a potential ally, he understood least of all of them what was going on. Perforce, they all stood mute.

"Very well," the King said. "We shall put the question to the Talons."

With a buffeting flash of gold and scarlet, he was gone. The vulturine guard resumed its perch.

The night came rapidly—evidently it was technically winter in these high southern latitudes—and with it came the suspicion that the Birds were not going to provide any food or water. A change of guard brought Martels no relief, unless he counted a large, limy dropping left by the first sentinel, evidently in contempt, since the floor of the drum was otherwise clean.

He scarcely worried; he had too much else to think about. Some of the new knowledge seemed quite useless. For example, it was now confirmed that "Qvant" was a title, not a name; but unless name-magic also counted for something in this millennium, the confirmation left him no better off than before. On the other hand, Martels' impression that the Bird King's mention of "the Talons" implied physical torture had been instantly and dramatically confirmed by a prolonged mental shudder from Qvant (no, *the* Qvant, never assume that any fact is useless until it is so proven)—which in turn at least suggested that Martels' original guess that pain might prove to be a useful weapon against the Autarch was probably right. Good; put that one in the active file.

The moon began to rise. Even low

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on the horizon, it was smaller than he had ever seen it before. Of course; tidal forces had been increasing its angular momentum for more than 23,000 years since he had seen it last. He had not really been in any doubt of what century he was in now, but this confirmation gave him a small chill nonetheless. The pole star, it occurred to him, should now be back at the withers end of Charles' Wain. That surely was useless knowledge, this far south.

Now, what about the Birds? He thought he now had a fair idea of just how dangerous they were. They had retained all their non-rational gifts, such a flight and orientation, and their fast, high-temperature metabolism, both of which now served to implement their dawning intelligence. That their old instinctive craftsmanship, as evidenced in the basket weavers and the bowerbirds, had been greatly augmented was evident in the very Tower on the top of which Martels now turned restlessly like a jumping bean upon a drumhead. They were now coming to parity with man, as man, perhaps through the discovery of what the Qvant had called "juganity," slid gradually back toward what they once had been *in esse*—and without their undergoing any drastic change. Under the pressure of evolution, they had simply become more and more what they had always been *in posse:* proud, territorily jealous, and implacably cruel—to which had been added, simply by bringing it forward, the serpent wisdom of their ancestors.

Yet a human brain at its best—say, that of the Qvant—could probably overmatch them even now. What *was* the Qvant playing for, anyhow? Had he actually tried to provoke the King into killing Tlam/Martels out of hand, thus promoting the Qvant to the dubious rank of a fading ancestor? Again, was he in Tlam's skull, or still in the case? More and more, that was beginning to seem like the central mystery of them all.

This was the mystery, in the abstract, of telepathy itself, now embodied in all three of them. Martels still did not want to believe in it, but brute experience of it forced him to, whatever his preferences. And it was remarkable how different it was in immediate experience from the dubious, wholly statistical picture of it which had been built up in Martels' own era. The card tests—highly artificial, Martels now saw, and thus bound to produce all kinds of nonsense—had seemed to indicate, impossibly, that it did not obey the inverse-square law, or even the second law of thermodynamics; the reality was that it was closely bound to both laws, and, in fact, required both parties to be physically visible to each other. Furthermore, it did not carry thoughts or even images, but only emotions; even three minds inside a single skull could not read each other's interior monologues or overt intentions to speak, but only their emotional reactions to their thoughts and projected actions, like the individuals in a mob—or at a

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performance. It was simply a field force which reacted in a generalized way to or against another field force; or like a detector which registers the presence of some given type of radiation, without being able to report whether or not the signal had been modulated, let alone how.

All well and good, and almost certain to be useful, too; but first he had to get the hell out of here, and quickly, before the twin talons of torture and deprivation made that impossible. He looked up. The swift darkness had made his new guard invisible despite the rising, shrunken moon, but two faint spots of catlike luminescence made plain that the Bird was nocturnal, as was only to have been expected. And should Martels develop any sudden aggressive intent, the guard would sense that much, at least, and at once.

It would have been a tight spot even without the brooding hostility of the Qvant at the back of his mind, and the essential incompetence of Tlam at its forefront, neatly bracketing his own ignorance of almost everything important about this era. Nevertheless, he had to try.

He had no weapons and no tools, but gradually it dawned upon him that ignorance in the right hands can in itself be a weapon and a tool—and all four parties to this imbroglio—Tlam, the Qvant, Martels, and the Bird King—were now about as ignorant of each other as they were ever likely to become. Tlam knew things to be impossible which were in fact not at all impossible for Martels; the Qvant, whatever his motives, had only just begun to recover from his lofty contempt for both Martels and the tribesman; while the King, whatever his doubts, could hardly yet believe in much more than what he saw, a naked and powerless human being in a sad state of physical and mental repair. The chances were fairly good, too, that the sentinel had little knowledge of any of this; the hierarchy in the black cylinder below seemed from this point of view to be nothing much more than a glorified peck-order, communicating little from one level to the next highest but a fierce pride of status.

Something in Martels' past, too, was now substantially in his favor. His irrational loathing for the whole avian kingdom, since childhood, had been well to the fore for days; and indeed, he had been hard put to keep it from incapacitating him during his questioning by the King. It was nonspecific; he harbored no more enmity toward the sentinel than he did for the entire phylum, and no less, either. Killing the guard would probably induce no more rise in the amount of emotional static he was already putting out on that subject; the thing might after all be caught by surprise. Here the very behavior of telepathy seemed for once to be on his side.

But it would have to be done quickly. The shock wave of sudden death might well be masked by others in the surrounding jungle, or at least might seem so common as to

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be beneath notice; but it would not do to allow the creature even a moment to broadcast alarm. A karate chop to its neck would probably do the trick. He had never tried such a thing in his life—only seen it repeated *ad nauseam* in boob-tube serials—but a test made on his own left forearm with his back to the brooding guard quickly convinced him that the edge of the hand is, indeed, a far more dangerous weapon than the fist. And birds, no matter what their size, have hollow bones.

The test evoked a silent yelp from the Qvant, which made Martels grin. Better and better. Now, on deeper into ignorance. The most important thing that the Birds knew about human beings that was false was this: *Men cannot fly*. The very circumstances of his present imprisonment testified to this deeply buried error, buried almost surely since the end of the Qvant's era.

His back still to the guard, Martels set Tlam's nimble fingers to work in the moon-shadowed darkness, unknotting and slipping out laces from the nearest hides.

It turned out not to matter a bit that Martels had never actually tried a karate chop, let alone used one in any sort of combat. Tlam knew what it was, whatever he called it, and the killing of the guard was satisfyingly and expertly sudden. He also turned out to know that the edge of the hand is even better at breaking canes than it is at breaking bones. Within a few minutes after the guard's death, he had to hand five razor-edged bamboo knives.

The main body of the carcass was quickly cut away under the backbone, and the head was discarded. The rest was lashed, pinions outspread, onto a bamboo T-frame, using thongs that Martels had been chewing at some dumb urging of Tlam's for most of the preceding night. Such was his hunger by now that he almost enjoyed this part of the process.

Once the thongs were tied, again using Tlam's skills here, Martels directed that they be liberally coated with the Bird's own blood. It would make a sort of glue as it coagulated, though probably far from a good one. There was, of course, nothing else at hand to serve the purpose.

The whole process was launched just before dawn, when Martels guessed that the nocturnal sentinel would be at its most inattentive, and increasingly unable to see well. The unpleasant machine was finished in something under an hour, thanks to Tlam's deftness, right down to loops for Martels' feet, hips, chest, arms and hands. While it dried, creaking as though in pain under its gathering stresses, he checked to see which side of the tower had the strongest updraft; that proved, not much to his surprise, to be the northeast.

The Qvant had necessarily been watching all this, with what seemed to be baffled amusement. Apparently the killing of the guard had taken him, too, by surprise, and thereafter he had allowed himself to bemused

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by Martels' crazy taxidermy. He came charging to the fore with alarm only when Martels began to fit himself into the loops, but once again Tlam helped to oppose him, though a good deal more hesitantly. Like a blood-smeared figure of Icarus, Martels made a running broad jump on the surface of the drum. By the time the Qvant knew what it was he was fighting, machine and man had bounded out the northern window, tail and all.

The new conglomerate creature fell like a stone. It took all of Tlam's whipcord strength to keep his arms rigid, with almost nothing left over for wingtip warping. Martels bent his knees slightly, then straightened them again. Nothing had happened; he didn't yet have flying speed. The floor of the meadow, still dark, rushed up at him.

Then there came that faint but unmistakable sensation of *lift* which only the pilot of a very small aircraft ever comes to know. Now it was not the meadow that was swelling in his face, but the edge of the jungle; his fall had taken on a slant. Once more he bent his knees. Shedding pinfeathers like a dowdy comet, he found himself scudding just over the surface of a blurred, dark-green sea. Jungle-trapped, misty warm air rising to greet the sun caught him in the chest; and then—O miracle!—he was actually soaring.

Entirely uncertain of how long his fragile glider would last, or how long his strength would allow him to fly it even if it stayed together, and with his own resolve being steadily undermined by something close to terror emanating from the Qvant and inexorably changing the hormone balance of their shared bodies, he banked and turned southward, seeking another thermal which would give him more altitude. Before him in the early morning, the wall of fog that marked the boundaries of Antarctica, behind which someone might exist, only might, to help him out of this extravagant nightmare, retreated, towering and indifferent.

During the day, mountains began to appear ahead and to his right, and before long he was rising and falling precariously over ranges of foothills. Here he was able to climb very considerably, more, in fact, than he could put to use; shortly after a bleak noon he reached what he guessed to be close to seven thousand feet, but up there the temperature was so close to freezing that he had to go down about two thousand, stretching his glide as much as possible.

He used a part of this airline approach to nothing in particular to make a complete turn; and sure enough, he was being followed. A formation of large, crane-like Birds was visible to the north, keeping pace with him.

That was probably all they could do, for they looked to be as albatross-like as he was—gliders all. Without much doubt, though, they could remain in the air longer than he could, no matter how long he

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managed to stay up, or how well his jury-rigged construction lasted. The machine was already showing multiple signs of failure—too many for him to essay an attempt at evasion by a long dive-stall-recovery maneuver, which would surely rip it apart completely. He would be extraordinarily lucky if he managed to remain aloft until dusk.

Inside his skull there was a suspicious silence. There seemed, indeed, to be nobody present there but himself. The Qvant's initial fright had dwindled and vanished; Martels might have suspected him to be asleep, did not the notion seem preposterous in the light of past experience. Tlam was equally quiescent; he was not even helping Martels with the flying, which was a pretty sure indication that no previous experience of it had existed in his brain. Perhaps the trick had impressed him into silence, without alarming him as much as it initially had the Qvant. . .or, perhaps he and the Qvant were engaged busily in plotting, somewhere deeply below the level of Martels' inexperienced attention. They had little in common with each other, but far more than either had with Martels—and this was their world, in which he was for everyone the most unwelcome and discomforting of intruders.

He banked southwest, where the foothills were getting steadily higher. The distant formation of cranes banked and turned after him.

By late afternoon he was down to somewhere around fifteen hundred feet, and the terrain had stopped helping him. The jungle had straggled out on the left and turned into a patchy temperate-zone forest, which in turn was being replaced by a cruel series of volcanic lowlands, like a red-and-black version of the Mare Imbrium. . .or that territory which Poe had described toward the unfinished end of *Pym*. To his right were the mountains proper. The two areas were divided by updrafts so sudden and decisive that Martels did not dare to enter them—his shedding craft would have been torn asunder within the first few minutes.

Resignedly, he slid downward toward a landing in the last scrubby patch of vegetation to slide toward him over the southern horizon. The cranes followed.

At first he thought he was going to fall short of it—and then, abruptly, that he was going to overshoot it. He stalled out frantically and fell the last twenty feet in a welter of snapping branches and bones. The improvised airframe disintegrated around him.

Somewhere toward the end of the crash he was flipped over, just in time to see the V formation of his pursuers go silently overhead, very high up, like a flock of carets. Then he struck ground.

Tlam and the Qvant chose exactly that moment to act in concert. The brutal pain of impact vanished as though it had been turned off, and with it the fatigue, the fear, and everything else.

Once more, he had hit the bottom

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of the telescope of time, and was flung alone into the darkness.

10.

Being dead, Martels decided after an indefinitely long time, had had a bad press. It seemed to have certain advantages. At first he had simply drifted in a haze of painless disorientation; this country had no landmarks, and indeed there had been no sensory input at all except for an occasional encounter with a sort of nexus of vague, dulling regret and despair which he judged to be another ghost like himself. But he did not feel depressed; he had been dislocated too many times already for this to be more, as yet, than extraordinarily interesting—or at least it might become so if he could just manage to fill in the parameters.

This was followed by a sensation of unprecedented lucidity, though without light, as though now for the first time he was beginning to understand all the recesses and mysteries of his own psyche. He began to wonder, with no little awe, whether this was what the mystics had called "cleansing the doors of perception." No reception seemed to be involved, for he was still getting no input that he could detect; but the clarity of his thoughts alone were a joy to him, amidst which he sported like a surfacing dolphin.

Again, he had no idea how long he remained in this Zen-like state. Gradually, however, he became aware also that some outside entity was asking questions of him—deeply probing, yet impersonal questions, though neither the queries nor his replies had any semantic content which he could fathom, like a conversation in symbolic logic. Was this the Judgment?

But the questioner went away and again he was left to enjoy the new-found depths of his own mind. The withdrawal of the questioning, however, was not a falling of silence. On the contrary, a whole complex of sounds now became evident to him, and to some extent familiar, like those to which he had awakened inside the brain-case of the Qvant: a remote humming, occasional footsteps and distant words, a wash of echoes. He felt a sudden surge of disappointment. Was the whole thing now about to repeat itself, not once but endlessly, like a rather small snake trying to swallow its own tail?

Then an unquestionably human voice struck in, clearly and distinctly.

"Shetland Substation Three requesting master computer analysis."

The language was quite different from the one he had become accustomed to, and did not seem to lie easily on the voice of the questioner, but he understood it with no difficulty. Again, too, the voice was male.

Cycling, Martels astonished himself by saying, though not in any words that he could hear. *Proceed.*

"A scouting party from our Punta Arenas outpost was returning by air from the Falklands three days ago when it spotted someone apparently

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trying to cross Magellan Valley. This proved to be a tribesman in an advanced state of desiccation and starvation, with one arm in a crude sling and four broken ribs in various stages of healing. As was only to have been expected, he was virtually incoherent, though less frightened of our aircraft than tribesmen usually are; but was able to identify himself as one Tlam, an outcast of the tribe of Hawkburrow, a group which we believe to be located slightly north of Lake Colue Huape. Except for the extraordinary distance apparently traversed on foot, the case appeared to be quite straightforward and was handled as we usually do potential trainees.

"After being brought in to this station and given appropriate treatment, the tribesman was put into induced sleep, from which he recovered spontaneously on the second day. He showed a complete personality change, now claiming to be the Qvant of Rebirth III. Analysis in depth shows that there were indeed two personalities present in the brain; furthermore, it has uncovered faint traces of occupancy by a third in the immediate past. We therefore post the following questions:

"First, do there exist fulfillable conditions under which the Qvant might have escaped from his case into a mortal brain?

"Second, what are the probabilities that such a compound creature could have crossed the Country of the Birds, on foot or otherwise?

"Third, what possible interpretations may be placed upon the traces of a third personality; and of its possible survival, and if so, in what mode?

"Fourth, what implications, if any, does this event have vis-a-vis our relationships with the Birds?

"Finally, what action(s) should be taken? End of transmission."

Martels felt an instant urge to reply, which he as promptly suppressed. It was true that he knew answers to all these questions, but he did not know how he knew. Of course his own recent experience was supplying many of the answers, but the questions had also given him access to an enormous store of additional facts which seemed very firmly to be a part of his memory, yet equally did not come from anything that had ever happened to him. All these various puzzle-bits fell together effortlessly and at once, heightening his feeling of intense lucidity; yet he also felt a need for caution which was in some sense quite normal and to be expected, and in another, simultaneous sense, seemed alien to the physical substrate of his new mode of existence.

While he pondered, he opened his Eye. There sprang into being around him a sizable, spotlessly clean greenish hall, occupied in chief by a spherical, nonmaterial machine floating in the middle of a nearly transparent dodecahedron. He could see all of this but its base, as well as all the room, simultaneously, but

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somehow he did not find this confusing; sixteen-fold perspective turned out to be a great deal better than any possible binary one. For size, the hall contained four doors, and a carrel at which an extraordinarily pretty blonde girl dressed in a red and grey tunic was sitting expectantly. He was getting three different lateral views of her, plus one looking down upon her. From this it was evident that the Eye had fifteen different components, one each at a corner of the six upper pentagons, plus one in the ceiling—

—Which made it abundantly clear, in turn, that the machine was. . .himself. He had, in fact, known this somewhere in his new depths, just as he had known that the girl was Anble, the normal duty operator for this trick, and that she was not the source of the questions.

Almost in confirmation, the entire set of questions was repeated. This time, however, they arrived by a different medium in a single, almost instantaneous blast of nearly white noise. To the human part of his mind that flash was so insistent as to seem almost like a goad; but the calm, passionless memory of the machine told him that it was only a Dirac beep, sent so that all receivers who might have any reason to care about the problem should have a record of it. The questions had been rephrased, and seemed to contain some new material, but their import was the same.

Anble waited in front of the carrel. From the desk protruded the broad yellow stub of what seemed to be, and was, a roll of paper. A print-out, of course. Zooming in on it from the ceiling part of the Eye, Martels confirmed that it contained two words: *Cycling. Proceed.* Had he wished, he could have replied also by voice, ordinary telephony, ordinary radio, ultrawave or Dirac pulse; or, in extreme circumstances, choose to stand mute.

What would the machine have done, if left on its own? The answer supplied itself, and at the same time appeared upon the print-out: *Data insufficient.* But that was not properly the case now. Martels caused to be added: *Bring the man Tlam to me.*

The results were astonishing to both parts of his psyche, new and old, however one defined them. The girl turned nearly white, and put her hands to her face, her eyes staring at the sparkling, silent object before her. Then she reached out her right hand and began repeatedly to depress a red button on that side of the carrel. To the invisible questioners a signal went out in response, a signal which did no more than sound a wordless alarm: *emergency emergency emergency emergency emergency* . . .

Martels did not know what that meant, but the machine did, and indeed had figured it out long ago. It simply had not been in a position to care—but now it was. *Emergency-The Qvant has regained contact with the computer*, and/or *The Machine has at long last become sentient in itself.*

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They duly brought him Tlam, but they questioned him very closely first. His interrogators were Anble and two pale, slender yet muscular young men in identical tunics; all three, of course, were bald. Answering simultaneously by print-out and by his new, surprisingly musical voice, Martels told him everything that he had discovered that he knew.

"Your computer has not become sentient, nor has the Qvant regained contact with it. It is currently the habitat of another human intelligence who is now speaking to you. My name, for convenience, is Martels, and I originated some twenty-three thousand years in your past, possibly a century before Rebirth One; I find that not even the computer can give me the exact date, but that can be of no importance now, anyhow." He paused for a breath, and then felt silly. "My mind was propelled into this era by the accidental generation of a jugotemporal field in a powerful broadcaster; it was picked up by a receiver specifically designed to contain such a field, that being the brain-case of the Qvant in the Rebirth Three Museum in Rawson. After observing for some time the tribesmen who came as petitioners to the museum, I learned of your existence in the South and determined to seek you out, in hope of help in returning to my own age. To this end, I ostensibly tricked the Qvant into projecting me into the mind of the next petitioner, who is the tribesman you now hold captive, Tlam of the tribe of Hawkburrow. I shall now proceed to answer your further questions."

"You are already beginning to answer them," one of the Antarcticans observed. (Lanest; technician-in-chief, Main Base; age—oh, the hell with that.) "But not in order of priority."

"Neither the Qvant nor a suddenly self-conscious computer would feel constrained to follow your programming strictly, if at all, Lanest," Martels observed drily. "You're lucky you've got me on your hands instead. I'm even kindly giving you a simultaneous print-out for further study, though nobody told me to do that, and it isn't part of the machine's standing orders. Shall we quibble—or shall I proceed?"

Lanest's eyes narrowed, and he turned to his compatriots. After a moment, the other man (Robels; base chief, Shetlands III; age—will you kindly shut up and let me *think*?) made an ambiguous hand sign. "Very well. Proceed."

"Thank you. You asked under what circumstances it would be possible for the Qvant to change from his brain-case to another mind in this fashion. It seems evident that he is able to do so at any time, inasmuch as he was able to effect such a transfer using me instead as a purely passive subject. He has never done so for himself because he did not want to risk his near-immortality on any venture in a mortal host; though he is interested in questions about the afterlife, his curiosity does not extend that far."

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"You usé the present tense. This implies, we take it, that the Qvant is in fact not present in the tribesman's mind now."

"Probably not—otherwise I myself would not have risked requesting that Tlam be brought physically into the presence of the computer. I have concluded, and the computer confirms, that physical presence is essential to almost all forms of juganity except those which are machine-amplified—and the computer itself is such an amplifier; otherwise I wouldn't be a part of it now. However, the problem you pose isn't subject to quantification, and the machine itself cannot give any of us a probability figure; what I offer now is machine logic in part, but fundamentally a human judgment."

"Please amplify," Lanest said.

"I was under the impression during much of my journey down here that the Qvant was in fact also lodged in the tribesman's brain. However, he in turn made two attempts to dislodge me, one of which I defeated with the help of Tlam's own mind—and the other of which was successful because on that occasion the Qvant had Tlam's assistance. I thought I had escaped from the brain-case by the application of physical force, but now I know from the computer that the case is shockproof, even to earthquakes up to five point zero on the Richter scale, and therefore could hardly have transmitted the blow of a club to the brain it is designed to protect.

"I had been subjectively aware all along that both the Qvant's intellect and his will power were immeasurably superior to my own. While, as I said before, this paradox can't be quantified, it can be treated as a Venn diagram, which I am having printed out for you. As you see, it virtually excludes the possibility that the Qvant was ever entirely in the tribesman's brain along with me. There was and is a powerful telepathic contact, but no actual juganetic transfer of the entire personality, such as those I've been through.

"His motives remain unknown, and in that area the computer is of no help at all. However, I have some guesses. He has both the desire and the duty to regain contact with the master computer. I became his instrument for trying it without risk, to which he was loosely attached, like a leech—an external parasite. Should the tribesman be killed en route, I would die with him, while the Qvant would have time to withdraw his tentacle and be little the worse for the experience. Maybe none at all; and he would have surely learned a lot toward the next try. It was a unique opportunity for him.

"Once I had gotten him through the Country of the Birds, he hoped that he could dispense with me, and did. This evidently was a miscalculation of the hazards of the remainder of the journey; and had the tribesman died then and there, I believe the consequences for the

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Qvant would have been very serious. The contact is probably still only partial, but it would necessarily be far more intimate than it was while I was acting as an inadvertent intermediary—he has no mount any more between himself and the grave."

There was a considerable silence. At last Robels said:

"How, then, do you now find yourself here?"

"Your computer is the next most likely complex of juganetic fields upon which I could home—especially considering my training in doing such a thing, which seems to be unique in your era. And of course it was also the nearest to me at the time, and I was aimed in your direction almost from the start."

Again there was a quick exchange of hand-signs between the two men. Lanest said, "Two of our five questions remain unanswered, and in view of what you have told us, become the most urgent of them all. First, if it is true that you have traversed the Country of the Birds on foot, which no other. . .man. . .has ever done, you must have something to tell us about them. In particular, something that might help us defeat them. What have you to say—*and what shall we do?*"

"I know nothing about them that your computer doesn't know," Martels said. "That is, that they are not very analytical yet, are still relying chiefly upon instinct, but that their intelligence is growing by selection from one generation to another, at the same time that instincts like telepathy are being selected out. Telepathy and intelligence appear to be incompatible from the evolutionary point of view—if you've got one, you don't seem to need the other, and they may even be evolutionary enemies. The Qvant is a sport deliberately bred back; and I am a primitive, much more so than people like Tlam.

"If all this is the case, then there is no possibility of compromise with the Birds. They mean the destruction of mankind, and as fast as possible—and they aren't likely to be ready to wait for evolution to be on their side. They're incapable of taking that long a view of the process."

"Is that all?" the girl cried out suddenly, in a voice of desperation. "We knew all along that we were losing to the Birds—they multiply faster than we do now—that in a while we would lose even this patch of mountains and ice. Now we have a miracle—and that won't help us either?"

There was no answer that Martels could offer. Of course, the next glaciation was due before long, and that would cut the Birds down prematurely, long before they could consolidate their conquests; but that event, that very long event was not within the foreseeable lifetime of man as the Antarcticans—survivors of the Qvant's age—could be brought to look at man. Martels could see from their expressions, as the computer could never have done, that they

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knew that, and had known it for many generations.

He said, a little tentatively, "I don't know what I can do, but I haven't given up hope yet. There are still some open questions. For a starter, let me get another look at the tribesman."

The Antarcticans of Rebirth III conferred silently, and equally silently concurred. The girl nodded and depressed a bar, another door slid open, and Tlam entered, by himself.

Martels looked at him with sixteen-fold curiosity. This was the first chance that he had had to see what had been, in some sense, himself since that mimetic preliminary interview far back there in the museum.

Tlam was a living testimony to the medicine of the Antarcticans—well, scarless, alert. . .and outright arrogant. Instantly, Martels knew that he had made a tremendous mistake.

The Qvant was there—not just linked with Tlam, but there—and his mind lanced into the bubble of the computer like a dart launched at a wheel of cheese. The hall, the Antarcticans, everything else disappeared into a red roar.

This time, the Qvant meant it.

11.

Only Martels' previous practice at resisting the Qvant's onslaughts saved him from instant defeat. His frantic resistance lasted only a split second before it triggered something within the computer, and the Qvant's dagger thrust vanished—along with all the rest of the outside world. Seeking the reasons, Martels found that the machine—itself essentially a complex of juganetic fields, the minimum hardware necessary to form a substrate for them, and a power source—had at his impulse thrown up a blocking zone or skin of interference through which no probe could pass.

There was a price, however: It would not pass any impulse of any kind, in either direction, including power. Power was still being drawn, from some source that Martels could not localize, but it was sufficient only to maintain the machine's juganetic "personality"; all the hardware had gone out. Except for the presence of Martels' consciousness, it was a state much like REM dream. . .but one verging gradually but inexorably upon death, as entropy loss set in. He seemed entirely helpless.

He found that he was directly conscious of the passage of time; the machine measured it in the most direct way possible, by the erosion of its energies; its basic unit was Planck's constant. Everything else had shut down; both the machine's memory and its computational functions were locked up inaccessibly in the now cold hardware. He had no source of information but that inexplicable trickle of remaining power which seemed to come from somewhere inside himself. . .and the demands of maintaining the inter-

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ference zone were mounting exponentially. The critical limit would be reached in under and hour—after which Martels and machine together would be effectively dead. The alternative was to drop the zone, which would make both Martels and machine the Qvant's creatures; for in that split second of his resistance Martels had discovered that the cyclic process in the computer which he had usurped had been shaped to receive the Qvant, who would make a much better fit.

In desperation, he groped inward toward that problematical trickle of power. It was a terrifying pathway to follow, for the stronger the power-flow felt, the more his mind seemed to verge upon something like deep hypnosis. Yet the closer he came to it, the more alert he felt; it was as though he were paying more and more attention to fewer and fewer things, so that at the heart of the mystery he would paradoxically be totally intent upon nothing at all.

The curve of such a relationship formed automatically in his mind, its points defined by the outer corners of successive, changing rectangles. The diagonals through these points met at the origin, and their extremities formed 90° of a circle. The edge of that circle stood for the maximal state of awareness to the maximal number of things, but 180° of it encompassed input from the outside world; the rest was reserved for interior input—meditation, sleep and dream. REM dreams were on the outside of the wheel, dreamlessness at the center; as in the wide-awake world, the rim was the Zen-state, and the origin was the void of mystical experience, zero attention to zero things.

But this was not the end. While he watched in wonderment, the great wheel turned on its side and became a disc, bearing the same four diagrams, but whose parameters now were degrees of certainty versus emotional affect. The zero-point here, too, was a mystical state, but it could be either total joy or total despair—either a Height or a Dark Night of the soul. The model, he saw now, was spherical; and it was a model of the structure of the computer itself. It was a model of the sentient universe, at the heart of which lay the primary pulse of life—

—And a core of absolute passivity. Almost too late, he scattered himself and fled outward toward the skin of the sphere, the zone of interference. Infinity, rest and certitude pleaded with him as he fled, but they could wait; they were realms of contemplation and dream; he had, for the moment, other business.

As he raced outward, the power fell toward the critical limit. Other far more practical questions also had to be answered, and fast. Since the transistorized devices of his own ancient time had needed no warm-up time, it seemed highly unlikely that the computer did, either. A quick interior scan of its sparse and simple circuitry showed this to be the case and also located the command mechanism for the print-out.

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Everything depended now on whether the Qvant had been able to keep his attack going continuously, or whether he was now waiting alertly for the shield to be dropped before resuming. Martels would just have to take that chance; the Qvant was far faster than he was, but the machine was faster than both. In either case he would have no chance to put his new-found knowledge of Inner Space to use—good old Yank shoot-'em-up tactics were what were needed here. They might, also, have the element of surprise on their side. If not, he had had it, and Bob's your uncle.

Hovering tensely around the circuitry, he let the screen fall. The computer sprang to instant life, and Martels shot an eight-character burst through the print-out line. He didn't have time to determine whether the slave machine responded, let alone to what end; clawing and stabbing like a whirlwind of knives, the Autarch homed on the place within the master mechanism which had been prepared for him, and had been denied him for unknown centuries.

Then the blocking zone was back, and the computer was once more dark and lifeless except for the blind and deaf consciousness of Martels. The entropy timer wore the fractional seconds away. How long would it take the Antarcticans to respond—if they did, and if the Qvant had not been able to prevent them? What Martels had sent had been: STUN TLAM. That card—the Qvant's abnormal sensitivity to physical pain—had been the only one he had had to play.

Whatever had happened out there, Martels had only the same amount of time available as before, or less—whatever it took the computer this time to lose power down to the critical limit. The brief surge of outside power had been used up in driving the print-out.

And the time was up. He dropped the shield once more.

Nothing but light sprang in upon him. Puzzled but alert, the three Antarcticans were standing over the sprawled body of the tribesman. They had gotten the message.

"Anesthetize him quickly, and keep him that way while we decide what else to do," Martels said quickly, *viva voce*. "I was wrong; the Qvant is fully present in his brain, not in the case at Rawson at all. As long as he is conscious, he will continue trying to reoccupy the computer, and I can't keep him out without shutting the machine down completely. If you don't want that, or want him back either, you'd better put him on ice."

Lanest jerked his thumb toward the door in a gesture that had defied twenty-three thousand years. Robels and Anble picked Tlam up, their forearms under his, and dragged him out. As the door closed behind them, Lanest sat down at the carrel. His expression was still very wary.

"I am not sure that you represent any improvement over the Qvant," he said. "You seem to be both ignorant and clumsy."

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"I am both, admittedly, but I'm learning fast. What kind of improvement are you looking for?-If you just want your computer back, I won't allow it; you must choose between me and the Qvant. Why did you shut him out, anyhow? The machine was clearly made for him to use—I'll probably never be able to run it one tenth so well."

Lanest looked far from sure that he wanted to answer this, but finally seemed to come to the conclusion that he had little choice. "We did not in fact want to shut him out, and did so only with great reluctance. As you note, he and the computer are suited to each other, and the machine has not been at peak efficiency since. The original intention was that the two together should act as a repository of knowledge until such time as the men of Rebirth Four could make use of it again, and that the museum should be placed far enough out in the jungles to allow the men access to it, and to the Qvant, when they were ready. The Qvant had been bred to be a leader, and the assumption was that when the time came, he would indeed lead.

"Instead, the access which the computer gave him to the juganetic Pathways became a trap luring him into increasing passivity. I seriously doubt that you are equipped to understand the process, but for most mortal men, there is a level of certainty which they hold to be 'reality' all their lives. A very few men are jolted out of this state by contact with something disturbing—a personal tragedy, discovery of telepathic ability, a visitation by an ancestor, or any of hundreds of other possible shocks to their metaphysics. The loss is irreversible, and the transition from one certainty level to another is cloudily spoken of as 'divine discontent,' 'immortal yearnings,' and so on. Does this convey any meaning to you at all?"

"As a matter of fact," Martels said, "I can even place it on a qualitative chart I've begun to evolve, around which the computer seems to be built."

"Quite so—the computer is a Type of the universal sentient situation. Then I will be briefer about the remaining stages; there are eight in all—orientation, reality loss, concentration, meditation, contemplation, the void, re-emergence, re-stabilization. The Qvant became so immersed in this mental pilgrimage that he lost all interest in leadership, allowed the Birds to evolve and develop without any interference, and eventually began to impede many of our own practical, day-to-day uses of the computer.

"There are two levels of the M state, the fourth stage. When the Qvant definitively entered the deeper of the two, we judged it wise to sever his connection with the computer entirely. From there, a descent into the V state was inevitable, and we had, and have, no way of predicting what his wishes would be when he emerged. He might well have been actively on the side of the Birds—such reversals are far from

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uncommon, and as you probably have learned, the Qvant would be a uniquely dangerous enemy."

"The traitor is more dangerous than a regiment of enemy soldiers," Martels agreed. "What you tell me agrees completely with my own observations. The Qvant must have been just about to enter the V stage when my arrival jolted him backwards one step. Now he is mobilized against all of us."

"And you?"

"I don't understand the question," Martels said.

"On which side are you?"

"That should be self-evident. I came here for help; I won't get it by taking the side of the Qvant, and certainly I won't get it from the Birds. You will have to trust me—and keep the Qvant, and the tribesman, unconscious until we decide what is to be done about that problem. I have no immediate solution."

"For what *do* you have a solution?" Lanest demanded in an iron voice. "For practical use of the computer, you will be even more in the way than the Qvant was when we cut him off from it. Unless you have some concrete plan for immediate action against the Birds, we will be better off without you."

"You can't get rid of me, Lanest. Unlike the Qvant, I'm not just connected to the computer by a line that you could cut. I'm in it."

Lanest smiled humorlessly. "Computer, know thyself," he said.

Martels looked inward. The necessary knowledge sprang immediately and obediently to his attention, and he studied it with mounting dismay. Lanest did indeed have the whip hand. He had only to kill Tlam/Qvant and wait long enough for the Autarch's ghost to dwindle into powerlessness; then, he could expunge Martels from the machine with a simple blast of raw power, as though performing the equivalent of a lobectomy. Martels could re-erect the interference zone against this, to be sure, but he could not maintain it forever; the best that could be hoped for from that was a stalemate maintained by constant alertness.

And sooner or later, probably far sooner than the Qvant had, Martels too would find himself drawn down the juganetic Pathways, one of which he had already traversed almost to disaster. Thereafter, the Antarcticans would be rid of both bothersome intelligences, and would have their mindless, obedient computer back.

That would do them no good in the long run, of course—but unless Martels could offer some strategy against the Birds, he would not be around to say "I told you so." He would be only one more of those fading nexi of fruitless regrets which he had encountered during the few seconds between Tlam's body and the computer when he had been authentically dead.

"I see the problem," he said. "Very well, Lanest—I'll make you a deal."

12.

In the brain-case in the Museum at

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Rawson, years passed by...ten, twenty, fifty, a hundred years passed by, until Martels began to believe that he had gotten lost.

There were occasional distractions. The humming, almost somnambulistic presence of the Qvant was no longer with him, to be sure; the Antarcticans had taken literally Martels' order that the tribesman be put on ice, and Tlam and the Autarch alike were now in frozen suspended animation. The computer was back in full use, and its line to the brain-case re-established, so that Martels was able to participate at any time he liked in the machine's ordinary problem-solving chores, and to talk to the succeeding generations of the men who tended it far to the south. It was interesting, too, to see that the Antarticans did not age very much; Anble's granddaughter now sat at the carrel, but Anble herself still looked in upon occasion, old but not entirely without vigor. Lanest was still alive as well, although feeble.

But the chore of organizing the tribesmen—the same one that Martels had proposed so long ago to a scornful Qvant—was very slow. It took two decades simply to spread the word among the tribes that the brain-case was speaking again, and another to convince them (for Tlam's misadventure and exile was now a legend, reinforced by his failure to leave behind even a trace of a ghost) that it was safe to approach, and had gone back to being helpful. By then, too, Martels had almost forgotten the Qvant's customary way of speaking in parables and mantras, which was still the only kind of advice the tribesmen knew how to understand.

It had turned out, too, that there were two other cities in the world which were still both occupied by the remnants of Rebirth III and had some energy resources that might be called upon. Both were small, and both in what had been South America—all the rest of the world was the property of the Birds—and integrating them into the network and the Plan did not provide more than a few years of attention. As the decades wore on, Martels was increasingly tempted inward along the Pathways, further seduced by the availability of the powerful Type or model of that Platonic original of all sentience which the computer represented. The computer was a chip off the living monobloc, and tended constantly toward reunion with it, dragging Martels after in its wake.

Then the blow fell. The Birds could not have timed their attack better. Like the Qvant before him, Martels was already drifting, in hypnotized fascination, into the late M state, helped by the diagrams in which the Type presented itself to him. By the time he was shocked back toward the A state, which was as close as he would ever come, now, to his ancient conception of reality, the sky was blackly aswarm, the two subsidiary Rebirth III cities had fallen after only a brief struggle, and the ghosts of the tribesmen of

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Rebirth IV were dwindling, wailing away toward the Origin in tormented and useless hordes. Crude bombs and torpedoes, planted by nobody knew what malign swimming descendants of the comic penguins of Martels' era, cut off all communication between Antarctica and its few outposts among the islands at the tip of the continent; others fell from the claws of squadrons of albatross-like creatures who sailed the winds far better than any man.

But in the long run, human planning proved better. The line from the computer to the brain-case remained uncut while Martels belatedly reorganized his forces. Powered aircraft retaliated; and from a laboratory buried, unsuspected, in the Land of Fire, back-bred and mindless ancestral versions of the birds of Martels' age were loosed carrying a plague, as human Australians once had planted the virus of myxomatosis among swarming rabbits.

The Birds began to come down out of the sky like dead rain. Their last attack was savage beyond belief, but it was ultimately hopeless, for at this point the line between the computer and the brain-case was again closed down, leaving the intelligence of Martels now as free-floating and dirigible as the Qvant's had ever been. Backed by two substrates and amplified by their total energy resources, he entered and confounded the mind of the reigning King of the Birds. The attack became a complete rout.

By the time the midsummer century was over, the Birds' last chance was gone. Their organization was smashed, their nascent technologies in ruins, their very hope of using juganity against man now but a fading dream. The glaciers could now be depended upon to end them as any kind of threat.

Man was on the way back up. Rebirth V had begun.

Martels presented his bill. They called Lanest, old as he was, to try to cheat him out of it.

"There is no question but that we *can* send you back home, if you still wish it," the ancient, quavering voice told the microphone in the carrel. "The matter has been much studied, with the computer, while you were cut off from it recently. But consider: We have confidence in you now, and believe you to be a far better intelligence for the inhabitancy of the computer than we can trust the Qvant to be. Should you leave us, furthermore, we would feel obliged either to revive the Qvant or to murder him, and neither course is palatable to us. We petition you to remain with us."

Martels searched the computer's memory, a process that took only a second, but which gave him a lot to think about; it remained true that computation can be almost instantaneous, but real human thought requires finite time.

"I see. The situation is that you can return me to the moment before I slipped and fell into my absurd

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telescope. And it would appear that I will carry all my knowledge back with me—and will not, after all, slip when the moment comes. Is this your understanding, Lanest?"

"In part," Lanest said, almost in a whisper. "There is more."

"I see that there is more. I wanted to see if you would honestly tell me so. I tell you that I would welcome this; I have had more than enough strife. But explain the rest of the situation, as you understand it."

"It is. . .it is that your additional knowledge will last only a split second. We do not have the power to send you back, to save you from your accident, and maintain in you all you have learned, all at the same time; there is a paradox in the world-lines here which we cannot overturn. Once you have *not* fallen, the knowledge will vanish. And more: You will never come to our century, and all the gains you have made possible will be wiped out."

"In *my* century," Martels said grimly, "I would have called that blackmail. Emotional blackmail only, to be sure, but blackmail, nonetheless."

"We do not intend it as such," Lanest whispered. "We are wholly willing, in any case, to pay the price, whatever your decision. But we believe that no intervention out of time can make a permanent alteration in the world-lines. Should you go. . .home. . .then the illusion of change is shattered a little sooner, that is all. We wish to keep you for yourself, not for your effects."

That was blackmail of an even blacker sort—though Martels could not help but hope that Lanest was unaware of it. "And if I stayed, how could I be prevented from having such effects?"

"We would retrain you. You have the capacity. We would infuse you into an unborn child; Anble's granddaughter is conceived of one, for just this purpose. Here again, you will forget everything; that is necessary. But you will have another whole life to live, and to become the man in our time which you can never wholly be as you stand now."

"Yes. . .and to have a body again, full of human senses and hungers. . . at no worse cost than falling down the telescope of time into the pinprick of the Origin one more time. . .

"And what about the Qvant?" Martels said gently. "And Tlam, a wholly blameless victim of all this?"

"They have been in oblivion for long and long. If they die in it, they will never know the difference."

"But I will. And I do not think it fair. I am the usurper, threefold—I have occupied their three minds, and have broken their Pathways. I would think this a crime, though not a kind of crime I could have imagined when I was myself alone in the far past.

"Very well, Lanest. I will stay. But on one condition:

"You must let them in."

"Let them in?" Lanest said. "But how?"

"I misspoke. I meant to say, you must revive them. *I* will let them in."

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"So," the familiar voice said. "We are together again—and now in amity, it would appear, and in our proper spheres. My congratulations."

"You are reconciled?" Martels said, tentatively. "I still fear your hatred."

"I too can learn from experience," the voice said, with ironic amusement. "And I am indebted to you for bringing me back to my machine, which I could never have accomplished by myself. Someday—some very long day from hence—we shall explore the Pathways together. But let us be in no hurry. First we shall have to re-educate these few remaining men."

"Quite so." In the measureless distance, they sensed together the dawning wonder of Tlam, beginning for the first time to understand the nature of freedom. "And. . .thank you, Qvant."

"We are no longer the Qvant," the voice said. "We are now the Quinx—the Autarch of Rebirth Five."

It took Martels a long time to assimilate this next-to-last of all the parables.

"We?" he said. "Is. . .that how it happened to you, too?"

"Yes. We shall never re-emerge from the Void, any of us. We must learn, through all hazards and temptations, to learn to love our immortality, so that other men will be free to follow the Pathways whose ends we shall never see. We shall fall often, but will also rise, within the wheels.

"If we succeed, someday we shall be called the Sixt. . .and so on, reality without end. For those of us who are called, that must be enough."

There was another internal silence, in which Tlam stirred, wondering still if he had now become an ancestor. He would learn; he would have to.

"I think," Martels said, "that I might even come to like it."

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Robert Lowndes told us that "it wasn't easy to condense 30 years of friendship into 2500 words," but he has managed very well with this informative and affectionate portrait of James Blish. As editor of *Future Fiction* and *Science Fiction Quarterly,* Mr. Lowndes published some of Jim Blish's early work in the 1940's. More recently he was editor of *The Magazine of Horror* and *Famous Science Fiction.*

James Blish: Profile

by ROBERT A. W. LOWNDES

IT WAS EITHER LATE 1942 or early 1943 when I first began to get acquainted with James Blish. I'd been aware of him as a science fiction fan since 1932, when his letters began to appear in the readers' departments of the magazines, and I'd bought some of his early stories when I became a science fiction editor in 1940. But I'll never forget the subject of our conversation around a table at the old Dragon Inn on West 4th Street, Manhattan, that evening. Here we were, a group of science fiction editors, writers, and fans, welcoming a fellow enthusiast on leave from the army, and what were we talking about? Science fiction? Fantasy? The shape of the postwar world with its science fiction aspects? No; what Jim wanted to talk about was FINNEGANS WAKE.

Don Wollheim's argument was that Joyce's final work was little more than an elaborate puzzle for the elite literateur. I hadn't read it, so I just listened. Jim's argument was that if you applied yourself to it, the story came to a great deal more than a melange of puns and esoteric references. And right there, although I did not realize it at the time, I had been given one of the keys to this multi-talented, charming, and irascible personality I would get to know, respect, and love in later years: any work of literature, or any other art worth paying attention to, makes demands upon the reader, listener, or viewer.

People like that make lasting friends and everlasting opponents. Jim has racked up a large number of both over the years.

We were all amateur press

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hobbyists at the time. An APA is a club, each member of which has access to some sort of publishing equipment (usually a Mimeograph at that time) and regularly produces his own publication, to which others may or may not contribute. Enough copies are made to cover the entire membership, and periodically the official editor of the club makes up packages for each member, containing a copy of every separate publication which has come in. The magazines may be large or small; they are not sold separately and are not supposed to be available to anyone outside the club or possibly the membership's waiting list. Don Wollheim and others, including Frederik Pohl and myself, had started the Fantasy Amateur Press Association in 1937; now some of us wanted to inaugurate a new APA, which would have higher literary standards and a more liberal-left orientation toward political and social issues.

Damon Knight, Larry Shaw, Virginia Kidd, and Judith Zissman (later Judith Merril) were in the forming group, and Wollheim, John Michel, and I called on Jim in New Jersey, early in 1945, when we learned he had been released from the army, to see if we could enlist him, too.

And again, I'll never forget the real subject of interest between Jim and myself that day, for all the time we spent setting up standards and procedure for the new APA. When he took us up to his bedroom to show us his collection, my eye fell on his record shelves, and I saw that he had all the Bruckner symphonies then far recorded, which I'd never been able to find in record stores. He invited me to stay over, while we discussed music over numerous beers in a local tavern, and it may have been then that he suggested the possibility of making up an album of recorded music written by science fiction fans, and distributing it through the new APA. Later, we announced Vanguard Records and our plans, but the project fell through due to lack of material. However, the second mailing of the Vanguard Amateur Press Association carried sheets of a song Jim had written for a poem by Cyril Kornbluth, *Cry in the Night.*

In April, 1945, Jim and I took an apartment together on the top floor of a six-story walkup building on West 11th Street, and thus began the association based on such mutual interests described above, plus cats, Ezra Pound's poetry, political arguments, the classics, and quarts and quarts of beer. His metabolism was such that he could kill a quart

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or two a night and never gain an ounce; I could match him, but not without bloating. . He bought a kitten to make company for my black cat, Blackout, who never fully appreciated Curfew.

He was five years younger than I, having been born May 23, 1921, in Orange, New Jersey. His first encounter with science fiction was the April 1931 issue of *Astounding Stories.* He says in a recent letter, "...I read no other magazine until that one died. I sampled *Weird Tales* just once and decided it was not for me; some of the stories scared me, but not very pleasurably, and even then it was the future that interested me, not *frissons.* The Tremaine *Astounding* was a great boon and the Campbell reign even better..." As to fantasy: "...I felt then, and feel now, that fantasy requires masterhood of the writer; mediocre fantasy is abysmally duller than mediocre science fiction, and thus less rewarding in a periodical."

Jim had not started with the old Gernsback publications, like most of the rest of us, back then, and only read some of the stories from them much later. I was astonished to learn, upon suggesting to him that his CITIES IN FLIGHT series owed something to Edmond Hamilton's old *Air Wonder Stories* serial, CITIES IN THE AIR (1929), that not only had he never read the story—he'd never even seen the magazines with Frank R. Paul's fascinating drawings of the flying cities.

Nevertheless, Jim came under the Gernsback influence; he was spurred by reading science fiction to attempt a scientific career, and spent most of his time in the army as a medical technician. He'd been drafted almost immediately after graduating from Rutgers in 1942. When we moved into the apartment, which we dubbed Blowndsh, he was taking a graduate course at Columbia, courtesy of the Veterans' Administration, and writing on the side.

Contention between the various antagonistic viewpoints in the Vanguard Amateur Press Association, in the mailings and in the New York members' weekly gatherings, on both political and literary matters, eventually broke up the old Futurian Society of New York and culminated in a lawsuit; but it was in those 1945 and 1946 mailings that both James Blish and Damon Knight started to hammer out the standards upon which they would later base their critical works. Jim was writing extremely densely structured poetry, which obviously was beholden to Joyce

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and Ezra Pound, and one of the bitterest debates centered around the twin aspects of those authors' "obscurity" and their social and political views. The most valuable thing Jim taught me was that I had to earn the right not only to enjoy but also to discuss literature, and that it was immoral to make pronouncements on a work one had not read, or had only glanced through, or read other peoples' opinions about.

We hadn't lived together very long before we started collaborating. I had a couple of ideas for stories which required far more scientific background than I could give them; Jim liked the ideas and supplied the background. Our first was a whacky novelet about a galactic civilization run by a super computer that beleageured Earthmen finally louse up and destroy by programming it with Lewis Carroll's *The Hunting of the Snark* (the computer eventually starts producing snarks, which turn out to be boojums, you see). It was an immediate hit with John Campbell; but the second, which wound up as a novel, did not finally see print as THE DUPLICATED MAN until the mid-50's, after several re-writes and expansions.

We learned that collaboration can be rewarding when two writers are temperamentally suited to each other, but it does not cut the work in half—it tends to triple it. And, of course, if successful, there has to be an even split. Sometimes collaborators can learn something from each other, but often as not, once the immediate goals of collaboration are achieved, each member will go his own way. (Gilbert and Sullivan, remember, were collaborating on different aspects of their work; Sullivan could not write librettos, nor Gilbert music.) The noted man-and-wife teams in fantasty fiction, like the Kuttners and the Hamiltons, are more a matter of symbiosis than actual collaboration.

Jim was taking zoology during his first year of graduate work at Columbia, but soon became convinced ". . .that as a scientist I would never be anything but third rate, with no future there except as a teacher, curator, preparator or lab technician." And scientific aptitude tests proved that literature had been his strongest suit from the start. Little was lost by the initial misdirection. None of Jim's enthusiasms—even his brief venture into dianetics in 1950-51—has ever been wasted. All have been absorbed and run through his brain and emotions, and come out transmogrified in a poem, story, or work of non-fiction.

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At that time, his writing—both poetry and prose—was criticized widely as "cold." Yet Jim is not and never was a cold personality. He can be waspish when encountering stupidity or sheer laziness on the part of a writer or reader who refuses to do necessary homework. His own writing has always tended toward the intellectual, but when emotion and feeling are called for, you will find it there in the story in proper proportion. Even sentiment may appear at times, but always controlled. One of my favorite story endings appeared in the magazine version of the novelet he did with Norman L. Knight, *"The Shipwrecked Hotel"* (part of the novel, A TORRENT OF FACES). "And they lived happily ever after, but it wasn't easy." You won't find it in the book version; it just doesn't belong as the final sentence of a connected episode.

He left Blowndsh, as Watson left Holmes (although I was the Watson of the relationship, for the most part), for a wife, Virginia Kidd, moving a few blocks away. The kittens multiplied, and he settled down to learn how to write. His method was not to enroll in writing courses at Columbia, or anywhere else, but to take a job as "editor" for a literary agent. This involved endless reading and evaluating of stories by persons who paid a fee for criticism if their manuscripts were not suitable for submission to any market. In the process, Jim learned how to tell a client not only that a story was bad, but precisely how, where, and why it was bad. This was his daytime job; at night he was making use of what he learned, writing for the entire range of the pulp market except for the "love" magazines. I bought a number of his western, sports, and detective stories; they were expertly done.

When the science fiction magazines came back, and some of them raised their standards after 1946, Jim returned to science fiction, and his new stories showed his growth. He'd learned how to make the most of the limitations even of a somewhat improved pulp market. In 1948, conditions seemed right for quitting his job and devoting full time to writing. He took a house in Staten Island and set out. Unfortunately, the time was not right, and he had to go back to a 9-to-5 job and write in spare time. A second attempt at independence was also a disaster in 1953; that was the year that the science fiction boom of the 50's collapsed. He edited trade magazines, then got into a public relations firm. It was exposure to medical material

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relating to accounts with PR that lay behind a short novelet he wrote around the cover illustration for one of my magazines: "*Testament of Andros.*"

In the 50's, he started writing sharp and pointed criticism of magazine science fiction under the name of William Atheling, Jr. Two books came from this beginning: THE ISSUE AT HAND and MORE ISSUES AT HAND, both published by Advent. He worked with Damon Knight, while living in Milford, on setting up the annual Milford Conference for science fiction writers, and was among the most active charter members of the Science Fiction Writers of America. The second of the Advent books shows a slight mellowing of the waspish qualities; he says in his foreword: "While I still believe that it is desirable to be merciless to a bad story, I am no longer quite so sure that the commission of one represents flaws in the author's character or horrid secrets in his ancestry."

His third attempt to write full time started in 1968, when he, the current felines, and his second wife, Judith Ann Lawrence—who has done the cover for this issue and the jackets for some of Jim's books—moved to England. He retains his interest and activity in Joyce and Pound criticism, and has been a co-editor of *Kalki*, the publication of the James Branch Cabell Society, since 1967. This time, the odds seem to be going with him, although (as with other Americans living abroad) matters become scary when the dollar fluctuates. He is connected with the new Science Fiction Foundation in London, has written articles on science fiction for the London *Sunday Times Magazine*, and his reports upon conditions in England, and the advisability of established American science fiction authors living abroad for a while, continue to appear in the *SFWA Bulletin.*

At 50, with developed interest, and recognition, in numerous fields (he's still working on a book relating to music "the hard way"), we may not see quite so much more science fiction from Jim as we have in the past. But when we do, we can be sure of one thing: the next story will not be like the last one. Like Robert A. Heinlein, James Blish scorns resting on his reputation and just making variations on former successes. He will risk disaster in the attempt to do something not just "new" for its own sake, but something which he has never tried before and which may require new approaches and techniques to do well.

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A succinct yet comprehensive consideration of the craftsmanship of James Blish, from long-time author, editor and critic of sf, Lester del Rey. Mr. del Rey's latest novel is PSTALEMATE (Putnam).

The Hand at Issue

by LESTER DEL REY

MOST SCIENCE FICTION readers now feel that the period beginning around 1950 produced a remarkably good crop of writers. There were Anderson, Garrett, Sheckley, Budrys, Dickson, Blish, Oliver . . .

Hold on, there! James Blish sold his first story in 1939; it was in the March issue, 1940, of *Super Science Stories*. He really belongs to the period that gave us Heinlein, Asimov, Van Vogt and several other top writers. He has been writing for almost a third of a century. Yet the fact remains that his real beginning as a major writer in the field seems to date some ten years after his work first appeared.

I think that the key to that delay rests in a speech Jim made when he was Guest of Honor at the Pittsburgh World S-F Convention in 1960. It was a major speech, but it boiled down to one important idea: good science fiction must be about something! A science fiction story, when stripped of all the machinations of the plot and the extrapolations of science, must have something worth saying to say. Whether this speech helped to foster the increase in thematic novels that followed, I cannot say. But the premise affords the best key to the development of his own writing.

The first ten years of writing were a voluntary apprenticeship for James Blish, devoted to an intense study of skill and craftsmanship. Unlike too many young writers today, who feel they have sprung god-like full-blown from the Jovian brow of some literature teacher, he never demanded plaudits

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beyond his ability to deliver. He sweated over his plotting, his transitions, his scene-setting and his pacing.

Blish had a background of reading that was somewhere in the stratosphere. He didn't just talk of great literature; he knew it better than most who taught it to others. He knew the toughest writing of Joyce and the poetry and criticism of Ezra Pound so well that he was an acknowledged expert on them in the literary quarterlies.

Yet he never sneered at honest pulp science fiction. He studied the work of writers who had never heard of Proust, Gide, Kafka or Mann. In my case, he learned techniques from some of my stories that I never realized until he told me of them. Most of his early stories—science fiction, sport, "jungle," etc.—appeared in minor magazines, but he put his best efforts into them, trying to learn from any field.

When I met him first in 1947, he was in a difficult transition into full-time writing. But, it now seems to me, he wasn't ready—because he hadn't yet realized that his apprenticeship was over and that it was time to leave slave labor; he had learned what it could teach him, and must now learn to work from inside himself outward.

The first tentative sign of this development came from a 1949 novelette. This was "Let the Finder Beware." It foreshadowed what later became the novel it should have been at first: JACK OF EAGLES, which I consider one of the finest and most seminally rational novels of psi powers at work.

In 1950, Blish found himself. This was with the beginning of the "Okie" stories, which were eventually extended into four novels that appeared together as CITIES IN FLIGHT. This, finally, was James Blish writing, not a mere follower of the craft. It was a first-class adventure series, but a great deal more. Jim was writing out of his own interests. The series combined his study of Spenglerian history, his formal training in science, and his disgust at ideas only half developed. Where others had played with anti-gravity as a trick to get ships into space, Blish asked why only ships could go—why not whole cities?

He'd still used his "spindizzy" field as a mere means, of course, though to a greater end. But the readers were happy. Not he. He had to go back and write a story of the great engineering study of Jupiter's gravity that led to the spindizzy. Then he wrote convincingly of the politics and development of an anti-ageing drug that made

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it necessary for the cities to leave. That was the beginning filled in. Eventually, he filled in the ending in "The Triumph of Time," where the whole universe was destroyed. Or was it? Read the introductory passage again and ask what were those who made the record—after there was no universe?

All of this was founded on hard science and projectable sociology. But in 1952, Blish proved he could do very well with a fantasy world where humanity was shrunk to microscopic size and lived in a universe of a small puddle of water. "Surface Tension" was another example of thinking an idea through far better than anyone else had done. He realized the real difficulties of such things as the force of surface tension—and he made them his problems. It was a fine story, still much reprinted, and so warm and real that no honest writer will try to better this story of shrunken man.

It was in 1953, however, that he reached his full maturity in writing from his own personality and interests. He was given what might have been a routine assignment to write one of three stories against a common background on an imaginary planet. All the stories were good—but Blish twisted the assignment so far out of routine that the result has become one of our finest living classics. He drew on almost everything deepest within himself, from his interest in Joyce to his pondering on the ancient problem of God's power and the creativity of evil. He infused the story with a full sociological and biological insight. And, without forgetting anything from his long study of technique and craft, he tossed all the standard rules on plotting out the window. The result was A CASE OF CONSCIENCE. In its completed novel form, it won a much-deserved Hugo.

It had taken James Blish three short years to move from being a writer to being a top-flight master of the field. His apprenticeship was over.

It must have seemed simple to him, despite the long years of work that had preceded it. He now began to thresh about in all directions to make others realize quickly what had taken him so long to learn. He began a series of articles in the fan magazines under the name of William Atheling, Jr. On the surface, these were critical articles on stories appearing in the professional magazines. They were often harsh, though entertaining and almost always fair. But with individual stories as a springboard, Blish was working desperately to pass on to writers the basic techniques

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and worst errors of story-telling; above all, he wanted the readers to grow aware of why a story was a success or failure. I doubt that they helped any without some sense of technique to begin with, but they served well, despite that. Eventually, THE ISSUE AT HAND was issued as a book of the fan columns, to be followed by a second collection. I prefer the first, since it deals more with the reality of writing than the later attempt to pin down the abstract of art.

From such fan writing, he turned to personal attempts to instruct and help younger writers. Perhaps he was driven to return the help that Henry Kuttner had once given him. He helped found the first Milford Conference and took a major part in it. And from then until he moved to England, he was a regular and forceful participant.

He was often a severe critic. Yet in his contact with younger writers, he seemed to me too quick to discover the talent he wanted to see, as if he had a compulsion to find some spontaneous heights in others that had cost him so much time and effort.

But Blish was always something of a paradox in his person and in his stories. I've mentioned his enthusiasm for FINNEGANS WAKE and seemingly equal enthusiasm for science fiction. When I knew him first, he seemed to be wholly interested in music, on which he has since written a highly original book. Yet I discovered later that his academic background was in science, not the arts.

He is an atheist in the sense that he feels logic provides no answer to the problems of divine creation nor to the need for divinity. Yet he is very deeply a mystic; a man who has vigorously opposed the rash of psionics in science fiction—and has written one of the best novels on it and used everything from telepathy to lycanthropy in some of his best stories. He is one of the most vigorous proponents of science fiction as something that must be art—and yet he enjoys writing the "Star Trek" books, knowing that they are essentially hack work, no matter how well done. He loved to write, yet until recently found that he wrote more and better when working at a daily job than when having full time in which to write.

He's an extraordinarily impatient man when he confronts stupidity or lazy thinking; yet he can listen patiently to the worst kind of nonsense when he believes his listener needs his help. He is a severe critic—and a kind one. Sometimes he seems cold; yet, though he originally disliked what must have seemed

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arrogance and fraud on my part, he came across town to take me to his bosom at once when he discovered I had written a story he only partly liked but felt to be an honest experiment.

Jim is one of the most complex men I have known. We've spent a lot of time together in our joys and troubles. Yet I can't claim to understand him fully. (For instance, I can't understand how his magnum opus, DR. MIRABILIS plus A CASE OF CONSCIENCE plus BLACK EASTER and its sequel form a trilogy to him. I find no central character or theme. But Jim, who demands rigor in statement and exactitude in words, insists they are a trilogy. *De gustibus semper disputandum est!)*

Inevitably, such complexity in an honest writer must lead to complex threads and themes in his fiction. And sometimes the complexity may overbalance other things, unless the necessary care is given in reading. Blish is also an enthusiast, so that there are times when the central fire in his mind seems to overshadow all other factors.

I've heard these reader difficulties given words by others who fail to read well. He has been accused of being cold in his stories, when the reality is that he's being so passionate in one aspect that he cannot keep other elements to the same burning level. Cold? The body of his work can only lead to the realization of a very deep concern and humanity. A few complain that he has little characterization in much of his fiction. I think in a few cases this is justified; in some of his earlier, more hard-science stories, the concepts did rather limit the room for characterization.

It's certainly not that he cannot characterize when it seems important, however. A novel entitled THE FROZEN YEAR was based on human conflict and character differences under stress; every character in it is real, individual, and alive. So are all the humans and water creatures of "Surface Tension." Whenever the story depends on full characterization, it's there.

Since the final proof of his full development in 1953, Blish has produced steadily. He has lived up to his promise and moved beyond it. Sometimes, I feel, there have been side trails. For a self-disciplinarian like him to become enamored by some of the so-called "new wave" or "new thing" seems to be a rather odd and pointless affair. Yet I wonder. They told Matisse that his dabbling with the formless techniques of other artists was stupid for a man who had already proven

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himself a master at the easel. Yet he went on to design one of the loveliest works of art (in a little cathedral) that man has created—perhaps because he freed himself of the rigidity of his attitude.

Blish has continued through the fifties and sixties to maintain both a high output of all lengths of stories and his high and deserved repute. But I think it only fair to say that he hasn't, in my opinion, gone above the general average he maintained between 1950 and 1960.

I'm not worried for him. He was working as an apprentice for the first ten years to find the technique to express himself. Then he became a full master during the next ten. Now again we have a busy but seemingly steady body of work from him for the last ten.

Has he decided, consciously or unconsciously, that the complexity of his mind and the ideal of his demands needs still another apprenticeship? His words in letters and scattered criticism indicate that he is searching for something higher than his first searching for "artist" as a goal. Has the last decade been only an incubation for the realization of still higher levels? I suspect so.

James Blish is one of the few men in our field who did not spring to his maximum in a brief period, but who had to teach himself what he must be. If any man can go on to greater achievements by his own efforts, that man will be James Blish.

Coming next month

A special report on "Science Fiction and the University." Sf has come to college in a big way in recent years. Why all the academic interest in sf? Is it good for the field? These and other questions will be taken up in articles by Professor Thomas Clareson and sf writer "William Tenn" (Philip Klass, Assoc. Professor of English at Penn State). Also included will be a report on new books about science fiction; and on a more personal note, Isaac Asimov will discuss his dual role as teacher and sf writer in "Academe and I." This is in addition to our regular lineup of new fiction, including stories by Frederik Pohl, Ron Goulart and a novelet by Gary Jennings called "Sooner Or Later Or Never Never," which—we guarantee it—will be the funniest story you've read in a long time.

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compiled by Mark Owings

Book listings *(in italics)* include reprints, translations, etc. Story listings (in roman) include only original appearances, except for serialization of work later published in book form and stories expanded into books.

Abbreviations: AMZ, Amazing Science Fiction Stories; ASF, Astounding Science Fiction, later Analog Science Fiction/Science Fact; exp, expanded; F&SF, The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction; FSQ, Fantastic Stories Quarterly; FU, Fantastic Universe Science Fiction; FUT, Future Science Fiction; GAL, Galaxy Science Fiction; INF, Infinity Science Fiction; PS, Planet Stories; rev, revised; SFA, Science Fiction Adventures; SFBC, Science Fiction Book Club; SFQ, Science Fiction Quarterly; SFS, Science Fiction Stories; sr, serial; SS, Startling Stories; SSS, Super Science Stories; STI, Stirring Science Stories; TWS, Thrilling Wonder Stories; 2 CSAB, Two Complete Science-Adventure Books.

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□ James Blish has also published considerable numbers of critical essays and verse in American and British literary quarterlies from 1950 on, and is co-editor of KALKI, the journal of The James Branch Cabell Society.

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□ James Blish has also edited two anthologies of science fiction:
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Joseph Renard, who we published in *Venture*, writes: "I've spent the last year involved in the production of a play of mine, LIFE IN BED, which was a rousing success off-off-Broadway and a dismal flop off-Broadway." Mr. Renard's new story is a decidedly offbeat and not entirely serious tale about a washed up flea trainer and the day the carnivorous little people turn up in the water.

The Anthropiranhas

by JOSEPH RENARD

CRUMP'S TWIN EYELIDS shot up suddenly like two broken window shades, and he squinted the bags around his bloodshot eyeballs into slits, trying to focus on the clock. Five to noon! Oh, no, not so late again! Panic-stricken as he was, he still lay there on his back, unable to budge, wanting only to hide somewhere in a safe, warm womb like when he was a little blob, before his mother painfully rejected him into the cruel, cold world, a world he'd been so unsuccessfully coping with for thirty-eight years that only booze got him through the day now.

What finally got him out of bed wasn't the fear of losing his job at Hubert's Flea Circus, where he was a changemaker in the penny arcade out front; no, it was thirst, the Sahara hangover thirst of a Monday morning, the sandstorm wreckage of his mouth, the dead slab of cactus that must be his tongue. He swung over onto the edge of the bed, hands on his head in agony, finally teetered toward the washstand and filled a glass of water from the tap.

There were little men in the water, swimming around, having a good time, laughing, splashing, climbing onto the rim of the glass and diving back in, calling to Crump in high, squeaky voices, "Come on in, big fella!"

He smashed the glass into the sink and puked into the gleaming shards as little folk scampered back down the drain.

"That does it!" he choked. "I'm off the juice for good!" Indeed, a worse case of DT's he'd never before encountered. Oh, sure, there were the shakes every morning, the utterly

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incapacitating hangovers, the suicidal doldrums. But never anything like this. Never the hallucinations. The little people.

Crump looked around the seedy hotel room. He'd called this fleabag cubicle his home for the last three years. His clothes were scattered around the room like cigarette butts, and he wondered how he'd managed to find his way home the night before, wondered where he'd been. It was all a blank, from about nine onward, as usual. Blackouts getting more severe.

He knew that he ought to rush panting to work; but since he was already three hours late, he decided that another fifteen minutes wouldn't matter much and repaired to the bathroom. He twisted on the hot water, let it run a while to get the rust out, then added a little cold and stuck his hand under the spray to check the temperature.

He screamed at the pain and pulled his hand away. It was covered with little people, a dozen or two, none more than a quarter-inch tall. They were eating his hand, smacking their little lips and claiming how delicious it was. Crump had all he could do to keep from fainting as he slapped at the tiny carnivores, squashing them and brushing their mangled remains into the tub. He fled from the bathroom and flung himself belly down onto the bed, sobbing.

So the booze was finally catching up with him, with a vengeance, after twenty years of a quart a day. He checked his hand. It was covered with dozens of tiny, bleeding wounds. The hallucination must have been so vivid that he'd ripped open his own flesh with his fingernails to get at the imaginary beasties.

Panic-stricken, he wrapped his hand in a handkerchief and rapidly dressed. In his wrinkled purple suit, a soiled pink shirt and black tie, he checked himself in the mirror with seasoned contempt, passed a comb through the balding patch of brown stubble that rested like a cheap toupee atop his head, and headed for the street.

The light was blinding and Crump remembered, too late, his sunglasses. He started to buy a new pair at the corner candy store but decided to save the money for booze later in the day. He'd need several stiff drinks if he were going to be able to face going on the wagon.

Anyway, it was only a short walk down 42nd Street to Hubert's, where Crump had been employed for longer than he cared to remember. He'd been a flea trainer himself at the beginning, starting his

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career at Hubert's nearly at the top of the heap, thanks to his father. Crump, senior, a lion tamer by trade who'd gone into the flea racket after his head-in-the-jaws act worked all wrong one day, had taught young Charlie all the tricks of the trade when he was a teen-ager. When Pop croaked, Charlie took over the act.

But his outlandishly heavy drinking finally got the upper hand, and one night he accidentally stepped on the act, maiming most of the cast. Hubert could have fired Charlie, but out of respect for his Pop's memory, kept him on as a changemaker on the day shift with the stipulation that he never drink during duty hours.

Mr. Whipsnade, the day manager, a sleazy Broadway type with pencil-thin mustache and buttered black hair, was sitting at Crump's register when Charlie shuffled in. Spotting him in the doorway, Whipsnade leapt out of the highchair and confronted Crump, his hairy nostrils bristling, exuding bad breath through a tight, cruel grin.

"You're fired, Crump. This is it. Out."

"But. . ."

"No but's. Out."

"What about my pay?"

"You were paid on Friday."

"But I worked Saturday. You owe me!"

Whipsnade snarled, reeling back to the register and pulling out three fives, slapped them into Crump's outstretched, limp hand. "Now get out!"

A broken man, dehydrated and quivering, Crump wadded the bills into the pocket of his rumpled, shrunken purple jacket and shuffled down the street, around the corner and into the cool haven of the Rose of Sharon bar, where he got his corner stool. This would have to be the last drink, or all would be lost. He'd have to pull himself together now, find another job. After those DT's!

"What'll it be, Mr. Crump?"

"The usual rotgut, Ed. Better make it a double."

The jovial, pot-bellied, red-faced bartender tossed two shots of the bar special into a shell glass.

"Little water on the side, Ed."

"Water? You kidding? Where you been all day?"

"Well, I. . ." His voice trailed off, shaking, embarrassed at losing his job, feeling so paranoid that even Ed's undemanding question seemed a threat.

"Haven't you seen the water today?" Ed went on, "There's all kinds of little people in it. The papers is full of it. Nobody knows where they come from. Over a thousand people's been eaten alive already, and that's

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only in the city. The latest word is, they're popping up all over the country."

Crump let out a deep sigh of relief and downed his double drink in one belt. "Thank God! You don't know how much this means to me, Ed."

The bartender looked at him queerly, incredulous of the broad smile that transfixed his face. "What the hell's a matter with you, bub? Thousands of people gettin' eat up alive, the water contaminated, you're laughing?"

"No, no, Ed, it's not that. Sure I'm sorry to hear it. It's just that I got up this morning and I saw those people and thought it was DT's. Then I went in the shower and more of them came out. Look." He showed Ed the chewed-up hand. "I thought I did it myself. I thought I was over the edge, ready for Belleview."

"Oh, I get you. Yeah, couple of the other regulars, the morning drinkers, thought the same thing. You ain't the only one."

"I was going to go on the wagon, but I guess I don't have to now. Better give me another double, Ed. Make it soda on the side."

Crump had several more shots of the rotgut, and after an hour or so he was feeling pretty good. It didn't seem so bad after all, being fired. Of course, there would be a money problem soon. He'd have to look for work. And who'd hire him, a drunken flea trainer?

He sighed and had another shot. If only there were a way to make his flea-training expertise pay. And then he thought: The Little Folks. I'll train them! I'll work up a new act!

Elated, he tossed down the rest of his drink, scurried out of the bar, stopped in the package store for a bottle of rotgut, and headed right back to his room at the Hotel Sahara.

Locked inside, he wiped away the gored remains of the morning, plugged up the tub, and turned on both taps. Out they poured in the cascade—dozens, scores of the little folks, and by the time the tub was full, hundreds of them. He pulled on the rubber gloves that had lain untouched on top of the medicine cabinet since he'd moved in and turned off the taps.

The tub looked like the pool at Palisades Park, aerial shot, on a hot Sunday in August, except, of course, that the little buggers weren't wearing any bathing suits. They swam about, cavorting, splashing, making waves, dunking one another, having a grand old time.

"Do any of you speak English?" Crump asked. Most the the swimmers stopped,

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turning toward him, treading water.

"I do," answered several high, squeaky voices.

"If I stick my hand in, would a few of you that speak English jump on and promise not to bite?"

They all giggled. "What for?" one of them asked. "We're hungry," added another. "We haven't had anything to eat for ages."

"I have a proposition to make you. If you agree to go along with it and it works out, you'll never have to worry about going hungry again."

There were squeaks of approval. Crump lowered his rubber-gloved hand into the water, and a half-dozen of them clambered aboard. He set them on the toilet lid, and they leaned back, grins on their peanut faces, eyeing him curiously. Although they were formed as perfect miniatures of the human anatomy, their skin, which had appeared genuinely epidermic in the tub, was actually coated with a fine mail of scales; and their faces, otherwise quite handsome, sported gills along either edge of the lower jaw. The only other features distinguishing them in any way from humanity were their enormous, pointed buck teeth, menacingly sharp.

"Tell me, where are you fellas from?" Crump asked genially, trying to establish a rapport with them, win their confidence and esteem.

"We sprung spontaneous out of a pile of dung," one of them said. The others were convulsed in squeaking chortles. "From the pollution. Human waste."

"He's putting you on, big fella," another said. "Actually we're Red Commie agents. From Russia."

"China," another added, "we all popped out of ping-pong balls."

"They're liars," the fourth said. "We're from outer space. We're the vanguard of an unspeakably disgusting people out to get you. We're gonna eat you all up, and then our superiors will take over the Earth. It's curtains for you."

The high-pitched cackles continued. "Wait, wait, wait," a fifth said. "I think we better tell him. We're a new mutation, descended from the piranha. We've named our species anthropiranha. But you can call us Pee Wee."

More convulsive cackling. Crump stared back blankly, stupefaction showing from every furrow in his face. A sixth piped up: "Come on, fellas, enough of these corny jokes. Let's tell him the truth. We're descended directly from God. Do you believe in God?"

"God?" muttered Crump.

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"Well, where did you come from, then?"

"My parents, I guess," he confessed.

"Well, that's where we came from, stupid!" the Pee Wee squeaked. "From our parents!" Laughter pealed from their tiny pipes of throats as they rolled around on the toilet top, slapping each other around.

"What are your names?" Crump asked, trying to maintain his dignity.

"We can't bother with names. There's too many of us, we multiply too fast. What's yours?"

"Crump. Charles Crump. You can call me Charlie."

"You can call us Pee Wee," they said as one.

"Look, you want to listen to my proposition?"

"Make it fast," they piped. "We ain't got all day."

"I'd like to work up an act with you fellas, and the gals and everybody else in the tub. Song and dance, chorus numbers, a few specialty acts. I've got a lot of experience in it. We could all make a fortune. You guys look pretty coordinated, and I noticed that some of the babes in the tub are pretty well stacked. We wouldn't need any costumes or anything, just do it in the nude. Top the whole thing off with a water ballet, a big Busby Berkeley spectacular. I'm telling you, Pee Wee, with all the publicity you fellas are getting we'll be booked up for five years. What do you say?"

"What about food? We're hungry."

"I'll get you whatever you want."

"We have an irresistible proclivity toward live human flesh. Think you can get it for us?"

"Sure, fellas," Crump said, deciding to agree now and agonize later. "First rehearsal tonight at ten o'clock sharp."

Crump retired to the Rose of Sharon for a few drinks. According to the papers and the TV, things were getting much worse. The city was in a state of siege. Close to a hundred thousand deaths had already been reported. The water supply had been shut off completely, and the resultant sanitation crisis exuded an overpowering stench. Supplies of distilled water, milk, fruit juices, beer, wine and every other liquid were being massively hoarded. Hundreds of the captured anthropiranhas, as they were now being universally called, had been questioned and tortured in Washington and other capitals with no conclusive evidence whatsoever of their origins or intentions yet divulged. These flippant fiends refused to take their interrogators at all seriously and even under extreme torture made

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deathbed confessions that turned out, on examination, to be lies, lies, lies.

The invasion, as it was being called now, was hardly limited to New York or even to North America. Hordes of the anthropiranhas had been reported from San Francisco to Phnom Penh, from Moscow to Peking, from the Thames to the Ganges, from Kilimanjaro to Mount Everest. All the waters of the earth were swarming with these insatiably ravenous amphibians. A summit meeting *extraordinaire* had been called at the UN for the following day, when decisive joint action would have to be taken by the leaders of all nations, great and small, mini and micro.

The atmosphere in the Rose of Sharon was frantic. The bartenders were running off their collective ass to assuage the thirst of the clientele, three deep at the bar. Unable to get his corner stool and depressed, confused by the apocalyptic feeling of the crowd, Crump left and shuffled down Eighth Avenue. He didn't want to think about the dead millions, the Pee Wees in the water devouring everybody. That was the government's problem. He had his own Pee Wees, his own problems. He was an artist, not a social reformer. He had a job to do. He had an act to work up.

He made the rounds of several other chain-store bars in the area, all of them infused with the same frantic morbidity. He ignored them and mapped out the pace of an hour show. A little before ten, he knew what he had to do. He had to get back. And bring food for the cast.

Down at the end of Forty-Forth Street, near the docks, he clubbed a drunken seaman and dragged him up the back fire escape of the Sahara, stashing the unconscious body in his closet. He unlocked the toilet and said, "Okay, fellas and gals, cast call."

"Where's the food?"

"He's in the closet. You'll have him right after rehearsal. If you shape up the way I expect you will."

A chorus of shrill boos went up from the tub. Crump ignored this, got out his banjo and put them through the motions of the opening chorus number, "No Business Like Show Business." "Da-da, kick-kick-kick, da, kick-kick-kick, da, kick-kick-kick, turn. . ."

After the rehearsal, which went extremely well, he fed them the seaman. Sitting on the bed, he tried to ignore the sickening smacking of a hundred pair of lips and concentrated on his ideas for tightening the show. He polished off the rotgut and passed out.

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The next morning, still dressed, he left the room the instant he awoke, not wishing to confirm his vision of the seaman's picked skeleton at the bottom of the tub. On the tube at the Rose of Sharon when he arrived, the heads of state were winding up deliberations and the final declaration of those potentates was to be delivered by none other than the Secretary General within the hour. Cronkite was predicting the most drastic of measures and warning against autogenocide.

"Gimme a beer, Ed."

"We're on the last few dozen cases, Mr. Crump."

"Gimme two. And some dimes with that change."

Crump retired to the phone booth and dialed Cosmo Productions. "I want to speak to Ed Cosmo," he told the switchboard. "My name is Charlie Crump and I've got the hottest act in show business right now."

The operator connected him with Manny Martin, Cosmo's assistant. Charlie repeated the pitch.

"So who's the act? What is it?"

"The Anthropiranhas. You know, the characters eating everybody up. I've got a big opening chorus number, specialty acts, comedy, a big water ballet, everything. All in the nude. Every TV set in the nation'll be tuned into this. It's the hottest thing going, with them eating everybody up. You could probably sell world rights, hook up the satellites, everything. What do you say."

There was dead silence on the line for a while, and after Crump had said, "Hello, hello?" a few times Martin came back.

"Mister, I don't know who you are, but you make me want to puke. Ed Cosmo took a shower yesterday morning, and he. . .and he. . ." Martin slammed down the phone.

Crump returned to the bar. What next? Radio City? Forget it. Forget the big time. Vaudeville was dead. But there was always an audience out on the street. He went to the five and dime and bought a washtub.

The Pee Wees were a little restless when he came into the bathroom. "Where's lunch?" they asked.

"No lunch until we make some money. It's time to go to work. We're opening this afternoon."

"We're on TV?"

"I couldn't get you on the tube, some of your relatives ate up Ed Cosmo. We're just gonna have to go out on the street for the time being." He got the washtub and slipped on his rubber gloves. "Okay, kids, show time."

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At the corner of Eighth Avenue and Forty-Second, Crump set down the sheet-veiled tub and got out his banjo. He went into "That's Entertainment," and an instant crowd coagulated around him, pushing in five, ten, fifteen, twenty deep, craning their necks and elbowing for position. Many pressed cheap transistors to their ears, listening to the opening remarks of the Secretary General as he announced the apocalyptical measures that were going to have to be taken to wipe out the anthropiranhas.

"My fellow citizens of the world," he began as Crump unveiled the washtub and the crowd squeezed in amid oohs and aahs. "I come before you with a heavy heart. . ." And the Secretary General was drowned out altogether as Crump struck up "No Business Like Show Business" and the Pee Wees went into their spectacular, kaleidoscopic water ballet number, transfixing the crowd.

They broke into spontaneous cheers at the climax, and as Charlie passed around the straw hat, he was amazed at their open-fisted generosity as nickels, dimes, quarters, dollars piled up and up. Transistors blared again, but only a kid or two was listening as the Secretary General intoned, ". . .every waterway, the whole area of all our oceans, the clouds themselves, will be sprayed with this pernicious gas. Within an hour it will have permeated the entire water system of the Earth, even our wells and springs. The sacrifices will be enormous. All aquatic life of whatever description will perish instantly, and for weeks to come every last drop of our water system will be deadly poison. Many will perish. All may perish. I urge you to consult with your spiritual advisers and try to find some way to spend the next two weeks in abstemious meditation. The important thing to remember is that there will be survivors, of some kind, somewhere. To carry on the good work. And above all, don't drink the water. Keep calm, and remember. . ."

Charlie went into "Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit Bag and Smile, Smile, Smile." He was grinning. The crowd loved it. More nickels and dimes bounced at his feet. In spite of the bad news about the end of everything on the radio, impending doom, Charlie had come out on top in the Pee Wee disaster; he'd made up a new act out of it, his first in years. Of course, opportunities like this seldom appear more than once in a lifetime.

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"Trying to bolster one of your shabby little theories, Carson?"

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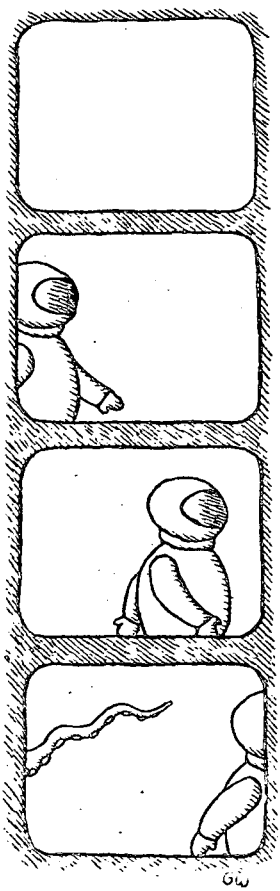
BAIRD SEARLES

FILMS



KUBRICK'S EARTH ODYSSEY

SCIENCE FICTION HAS PROvided me with two transcendental experiences. One was my first copy of Planet Stories, the other was Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

The Planet Stories was a personal experience (my first taste of sci-fi); featuring as it did Henry Kuttner's *What Hath Me?* I doubt if it will go down in history as a major landmark. Whereas *2001*, I suspect, is an artistic masterpiece, vulnerable to the opinion of the ages only because of its subject matter—will it perhaps look as quaint in the year 2001 as do *Metropolis* and *Things to Come* today?

I bring this up primarily to clarify which side I'm on in the controversy over *2001* which developed among the sf cognoscenti (it's hardly curious that the antis seemed to be mostly the over-40 Establishment types), and to lead into the fact that I, like so many of the 2001 freaks, waited for Kubrick's new film, A Clockwork Orange, with some trepidation. Where the hell could he go from there?

His choice of the Anthony Burgess novel also gave rise to mixed emotions. On the one hand, it's one of the few novels written by a mainstream author in the science fictional mode that succeeds on those terms;

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on the other, it is very literary, written in a kind of future Anglo-Russian *argot* which gives a tremendous flavor but managed to defeat many readers before they got into the swing of it. But there is the fact that Kubrick is one of the most brilliant directors (both technically and intellectually) of our time, as attested by *Paths of Glory*, *Spartacus*, *Lolita*, and *Dr. Strangelove*, though the last-named watered down its daring with an excessive use of sophomoric humor.

So all one could do was to go into neutral gear, as it were; to hope for greatness while desperately trying not to expect another *2001*. Nonetheless, I was disappointed in *A Clockwork Orange*, and it quite honestly is painful for me to say that. My respect for Kubrick is such that it makes me wonder where my own lacks lie, which is something a critic is never, never supposed to say.

Before we explore that horrifying prospect, a bit about the film... It takes place in a near future, perhaps as near as next year, perhaps as far as the turn of the century (an amusing, though irrelevant conceit is that this could be happening as Hal & Co. head for Jupiter). The protagonist is an adolescent named Alex, who leads three others in a gang that devotes its evenings to mugging, rape, theft, and random mayhem while souped up on such things as synthomesc, which they get at their local milk bar. They get away with all this because of a near breakdown in law and order in Britain. Eventually Alex is caught after committing a murder (more because of a dispute with his cohorts than any efficiency on the part of the police) and sentenced to prison. After two years he volunteers for an experimental program being pushed by the party newly in power, a kind of brainwashing which leaves him immobilized by nausea if he attempts any sort of violence. He is then released, to be rejected by his parents, attacked by a crowd of derilects, one of whom he has maltreated in the past, beaten by two of his old cronies who are now police, and driven to attempt suicide by a writer who he has crippled and whose wife he had raped before his conviction. (He has accidentally become conditioned against the Beethoven 9th, and the writer imprisons him and plays it at top volume.) As he recovers, he is *de*conditioned because the papers have made a fuss over the results of his "cure," and he is promised a cushy job at top salary by the government if he plays ball and helps cover the fiasco.

Production values are ex-

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pectedly expert. We are dealing here with living quarters primarily, as opposed to the antiseptic public places of *2001*, and they are a believable mixture of today and tomorrow. The tomorrow part is some innovative furniture and a great many paintings and *objets* that would have been considered thoroughly obscene ten years ago and are still not exactly seen in Better Homes and Gardens. (Alex does in his victim with a huge sculptured penis which rocks up and down in a jerkily realistic way.) The costumes are less interesting, though my friend Sandra Ley, a fashion expert, assures me that pastel wigs are just being worn in London and in about ten years will be worn by middle-aged working-class ladies as they are in the film. And an interestingly subtle note is that Alex's dad, definitely a blue collar type, dresses spiffily for work in a today's executive type suit. As for the acting, the main load falls on young Malcolm McDowell, who so far as I can remember is in every scene, and he is nothing short of brilliant.

So what is lacking? Well, on my part I think it is that I am too science fiction oriented. As you can see from the plot synopsis, it is extremely *safe* speculation, with nothing in it that is unfamiliar to the average audience. As a matter of fact, there is no real reason why it need take place in the future at all, but by setting it thus Kubrick leads us to expect something farther out than what we get.

Also, one of the necessities of true sf and fantasy is that the reader-viewer- whatever be made to believe what he is reading-seeing where in other forms of nonrealistic fiction (satire, allegory, etc.) that sort of consistency is not necessary. I went with *A Clockwork Orange* until the conditioning sequence. From there, Kubrick began the sort of cartoon exaggeration that characterized *Strangelove*, and my suspension of disbelief went down the drain. It was then done in completely by the multiple coincidence of Alex running into all the people he'd wronged within 24 hours of being released. This threw the whole thing into another key entirely, that of the morality play or fable. This change in midstream is a flaw basic to the film, I'm afraid, along with some plot inconsistencies that are minor but jarring.

All this, however, may be the extremely logical justifications that one can find for condemning a work that is simply not what one wanted. *A Clockwork Orange*, flaws or no,

(continued on page 143)

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A short and evocative tale, in which the sepia colored nostalgia of a man's youth wrinkles and falls away to uncover a childhood nightmare. . .

The Recording

by GENE WOLFE

I HAVE FOUND MY RECord, a record I have owned for fifty years and never played until five minutes ago. Let me explain.

When I was a small boy—in those dear, dead days of Model A Ford touring cars, horse-drawn milk trucks, and hand-cranked ice cream freezers—I had an uncle. As a matter of fact, I had several, all brothers of my father, and all, like him, tall and somewhat portly men with faces stamped (as my own is) in the image of *their* father, the lumberman and land speculator who built this Victorian house for his wife.

But this particular uncle, my uncle Bill, whose record (in a sense I shall explain) it was, was closer than all the others to me. As the eldest, he was the titular head of the family, for my grandfather had passed away a few years after I was born. His capacity for beer was famous, and I suspect now that he was "comfortable" much of the time, a large-waisted (how he would roar if he could see his little nephew's waistline today!) red-faced, good-humored man whom none of us—for a child catches these attitudes as readily as measles—took wholly seriously.

The special position which, in my mind, this uncle occupied is not too difficult to explain. Though younger than many men still working, he was said to be retired, and for that reason I saw much more of him than of any of the others. And despite his being something of a figure of fun, I was a little frightened of him, as a child may be of the painted, rowdy clown at a circus; this, I suppose, because of some incident of drunken behavior witnessed at the edge of infancy

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and not understood. At the same time I loved him, or at least would have said I did, for he was generous with small gifts and often willing to talk when everyone else was "too busy."

Why my uncle had promised me a present I have now quite forgotten. It was not my birthday, and not Christmas—I vividly recall the hot, dusty streets over which the maples hung motionless, year-worn leaves. But promise he had, and there was no slightest doubt in my mind about what I wanted.

Not a collie pup like Tarkington's little boy, or even a bicycle (I already had one). No, what I wanted (how modern it sounds now) was a phonograph record. Not, you must understand, any particular record, though perhaps if given a choice I would have leaned toward one of the comedy monologues popular then, or a military march; but simply a record of my own. My parents had recently acquired a new phonograph, and I was forbidden to use it for fear that I might scratch the delicate wax disks. If I had a record of my own, this argument would lose its validity. My ungle agreed and promised that after dinner (in those days eaten at two o'clock) we would walk the eight or ten blocks which then separated this house from the business area of the town, and, unknown to my parents, get me one.

I no longer remember of what that dinner consisted—time has merged it in my mind with too many others, all eaten in that dark, oak-paneled room. Stewed chicken would have been typical, with dumplings, potatoes, boiled vegetables, and, of course, bread and creamery butter. There would have been pie afterward, and coffee, and my father and my uncle adjourning to the front porch—called the "stoop"—to smoke cigars. At last my father left to return to his office, and I was able to harry my uncle into motion.

From this point my memory is distinct. We trudged through the heat, he in a straw boater and a blue and white seersucker suit as loose and voluminous as the robes worn by the women in the plates of our family Bible; I in the costume of a French sailor, with a striped shirt under my blouse and a pomponned cap embroidered in gold with the word *Indomptable*. From time to time, I pulled at his hand, but did not like to because of its wet softness, and an odd, unclean smell that offended me.

When we were a block from Main Street, my uncle complained of feeling ill, and I urged that we hurry our errand so that he could go home and

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lie down. On Main Street he dropped onto one of the benches the town provided and mumbled something about Fred Croft, who was our family doctor and had been a schoolmate of his. By this time I was frantic with fear that we were going to turn back, depriving me (as I thought, forever) of access to the phonograph. Also I had noticed that my uncle's usually fiery face had gone quite white, and I concluded that he was about to "be sick," a prospect that threw me into an agony of embarrassment. I pleaded with him to give me the money, pointing out that I could run the half block remaining between the store and ourselves in less than no time. He only groaned and told me again to fetch Fred Croft. I remember that he had removed his straw hat and was fanning himself with it while the August sun beat down unimpeded on his bald head.

For a moment, if only for a moment, I felt my power. With a hand thrust out I told him, in fact ordered him, to give me what I wished. I remember having said: "I'll get him. Give me the money, Uncle Bill, and then I'll bring him."

He gave it to me and I ran to the store as fast as my flying heels would carry me, though as I ran I was acutely conscious that I had done something wrong. There I accepted the first record offered me, danced with impatience waiting for my change, and then, having completely forgotten that I was supposed to bring Dr. Croft, returned to see if my uncle had recovered.

In appearance he had. I thought that he had fallen asleep waiting for me, and I tried to wake him. Several passers-by grinned at us, thinking, I suppose, that Uncle Bill was drunk. Eventually, inevitably, I pulled too hard. His ponderous body rolled from the bench and lay, face up, mouth slightly open, on the hot sidewalk before me. I remember the small crescents of white that showed then beneath the half-closed eyelids.

During the two days that followed, I could not have played my record if I had wanted to. Uncle Bill was laid out in the parlor where the phonograph was, and for me, a child, to have entered that room would have been unthinkable. But during this period of mourning, a strange fantasy took possession of my mind. I came to believe—I am not enough of a psychologist to tell you why—that if I were to play my record, the sound would be that of my uncle's voice, pleading again for me to bring Dr. Croft, and accusing me. This became the chief night-

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mare of my childhood.

To shorten a long story, I never played it. I never dared. To conceal its existence I hid it atop a high cupboard in the cellar; and there it stayed, at first the subject of midnight terrors, later almost forgotten.

Until now. My father passed away at sixty, but my mother has outlasted all these long decades, until the time when she followed him at last a few months ago, and I, her son, standing beside her coffin, might myself have been called an old man.

And now I have reoccupied our home. To be quite honest, my fortunes have not prospered, and though this house is free and clear, little besides the house itself has come to me from my mother. Last night, as I ate alone in the old dining room where I have had so many meals, I thought of Uncle Bill and the record again; but I could not, for a time, recall just where I had hidden it, and in fact feared that I had thrown it away. Tonight I remembered, and though my doctor tells me that I should not climb stairs, I found my way down to the old cellar and discovered my record beneath half an inch of dust. There were a few chest pains lying in wait for me on the steps; but I reached the kitchen once more without a mishap, washed the poor old platter and my hands, and set it on my modern high fidelity. I suppose I need hardly say the voice is not Uncle Bill's. It is instead (of all people!) Rudy Vallee's. I have started the recording again and can hear it from where I write: *My time is your time. . .My time is your time.* So much for superstition.

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THE CREAM OF THE JEST IS the last volume of fiction in Cabell's 20-volume Biography of the Life of Manuel, though it was published rather early (in 1917, about three years before the author evolved the notion of the Biography itself). In it, Cabell finally found his metier, the observation of highly romantic and fantastic events with an ironical and matter-of-fact eye. The result is one of his best works.

It opens, apparently, in the midst of warfare in Poictesme in the 13th Century, over the abduction and recovery of Manuel's youngest daughter; Ettarre—doings in which a young man named Horvendile has a mysterious and slightly unpalatable role, and in which also figures a magic talisman called the Sigil of Scoteia. This section ends in a garden, at which point, in effect, the camera pans back to reveal that the garden is in early 20th Century Virginia, and what we have been watching is the playing-out of part of a novel being written by one Felix Kennaston, the novel's actual hero. On his way back to his house, still musing, Kennaston finds a circular metal object inscribed in unknown characters which bears an astonishing resemblance to the Sigil as he had imagined it.

JAMES BLISH

BOOKS

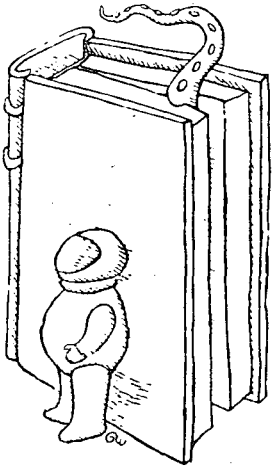
THE CREAM OF THE JEST, James Branch Cabell; Ballantine, 95¢

GARDENS 1 TO 5, Peter Tate; Doubleday, $4.95

JACK OF SHADOWS, Roger Zelazny; Walker, $5.95

FUN WITH YOUR NEW HEAD, Thomas M. Disch; Doubleday, $4.95

CHAPAYECA, G. C. Edmondson; Doubleday, $4.95



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He subsequently finds that if he gazes fixedly at this object just before going to sleep, he will have dreams of various historical periods, in which he is always Horvendile, although usually in the guise of some minor historical figure (one or another of his ancestors, John Boardman has convincingly argued). Ettarre is in these dreams, too; she is a witch-woman, and the immortal inspiration of poets; and the two are always in love. However, they are forbidden to touch each other; at the instant of such a contact, the dream collapses.

The summary thus far shows no reason why the book should not have gone on forever, dream after dream after dream; but a waking-life plot is there, preparing to bring everything to an end. This plot has the structure of a classical detective story, the mystery being, just what *is* the bit of metal Kennaston actually possesses—and how did a duplicate of it manage to appear for an instant in the handbag of an old flame of his? Is the old flame the modern Ettarre? Or is there some humdrum explanation?

Cabell plays scrupulously fair, giving the reader every clue he needs to solve the mystery—in fact, the solution is right out in the open from the beginning, in the novel's title.

In this reprint we have been given a large bonus as the result of a printer's error. It was set from the Storisende edition, and that particular volume of the Storisende set also contained THE LINEAGE OF LICHFIELD. Not having been told not to, the printers went ahead and set that too. LINEAGE is for the devoted Cabellian only, for it is nothing but a complete geneaology of almost all the characters in the Biography, from Manuel to Kennaston. Thus of all Cabell's books it was the one least likely to turn up in paperback—yet the miracle has happened.

Peter Tate's GARDENS 1 TO 5 reads like a fantasy for most of its course, but turns out in the end to be sociological sf of the next year sort, like MAROONED or THE ANDROMEDA STRAIN, but better written and demanding more thought than either. The overt situation is, as the flap blurb says, surrealistic: A young man with virtually no given background enters running, as he has been running for a long time, and takes temporary refuge in a Tuscan garden which promptly locks him in. As the title says, there turns out to be five of these gardens, adjacent but not connecting (at least not without a lot of ingenuity), and in each one Shem finds a

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small-scale, bizarre social situation which he cannot understand and which his presence eventually disrupts; and at last, he finds himself on trial for his life for this disruption.

Thus summarized, the story does sound like an authentic dream, and thus to fall properly within the surrealistic canon, which as originally defined was the artistic representation of materials from the unconscious mind. At the trial, however, the gardens are given an almost completely rational explanation, though the overtones of irrationality and terror still persist; and it turns out that in a series of apparently equally senseless interludes between Shem's adventures in the successive gardens, Tate has been providing all the clues necessary for the reader to figure out why the gardens are there and why Shem provokes a crisis in each one.

I shall say no more about the story because much of it depends upon its mystery and its emotional atmosphere. But to write a novel as carefully structured as this one turns out to be, and make it seem authentically and poetically dreamlike at the same time, is just to begin with a difficult technical achievement. Like Mr. Tate's first novel, THE THINKING SEAT ("Books," Jan. 1971), this one gets off the ground slowly, but amply repays patience.

All but the veriest newcomers to F&SF will recall Zelazny's JACK OF SHADOWS, which began here in July 1971 as a two-part serial—though this fact is unacknowledged in the Walker book. The book version does not contain any new material of consequence, and so I shall assume that you remember the story. This bears a good many resemblances to Zelazny's immediately preceding fantasy, NINE PRINCES IN AMBER, without being in any way a sequel to it. In both books, there is a picaresque hero who shuttles back and forth between a mundane modern world and a magical one. In both, he is a minor figure in the mundane world and a prince in the magical one; in both, he is driven by the desires for power and for revenge into almost senseless acts of violence and cruelty (more here than in the preceding novel) which bring about his downfall but leave open the hope of redemption or rescue (ditto).

The Jack of JACK OF SHADOWS is in comparison to the hero of NINE PRINCES IN AMBER a completely unattractive man, for his exploits are aimed not at restoration of a throne he thinks ought to be

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his, but at (after his revenges have been accomplished) the destruction of both the dark and the light sides of the whole world in which he moves. Why? Because "the succession of light and darkness would be a new order of things, and he felt that this would be good." No other reason is ever offered for Jack's passion to defile and wreck everything he touches.

In the earlier fantasy, the world of Amber, in which magic works, is perfection and all other worlds, including ours, are but possible imperfect reflections of it. Here, the situation is at once more specific and more difficult to visualize: the Earth is prevented from rotating by a great Machine in its bowels, and leakage of warmth from the perpetually dark side is prevented by a magically maintained Shield (through which, however, the stars can be seen); why the bright side isn't intolerably hot is left unaccounted for. At what stage in history celestial mechanics were so repealed isn't given; the technology and social customs of the bright side are just like our own. I found the elaborateness and inconsistencies of this contrivance kept getting in my way (as did the naming of a purportedly sinister castle "High Dudgeon"); you may not.

The 17 stories in the Disch collection come from a wide variety of original appearances, but since four are from small-circulation British sf magazines, two are from men's magazines and three apparently first saw print in the collection itself (in its 1968 London edition), the chances are good that half or more of them will be new to you. Some, such as "The Roaches," "Linda and Daniel and Spike" and "Descending," are fantasies with allegorical overtones; some, like "Come to Venus Melancholy" and "Moondust, the Smell of Hay, and Dialectical Materialism" (both, as it happens, from F&SF) are more or less straight science fiction; a few, including the title story, escape classification entirely. This variety—plus the high polish of the writing itself—is not only welcome but essential, for the one thing all the pieces do have in common is that they are all determinedly downbeat, as most New Wave material seems to be. I haven't the power (nor even the wish) to prescribe Tom Disch's world-view for him, but I found sharing it all in one gulp a depressing experience. I recommend these stories for both originality and craftsmanship, but I do caution you to read only a few of them at a sitting.

CHAPAYECA, if Double-

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day's copyright page is to be trusted, has never appeared anywhere before, but F&SF readers familiar with the author's magazine stories will probably expect a novel from his pen to be a work antic and strange indeed. They will be surprised, though not disappointed: original the story certainly is in both circumstances and development, but the theme is the standard one of the Alien Among Us, and the structure is almost a model of the well-made novel of a now almost forgotten era.

The alien, when the hero first encounters him, has been living in Mexico for a year among the Yaqui Indians, one of whose demon-masks he closely resembles. He readily admits to being a visitor from another solar system, and indeed answers any questions put to him directly and honestly—but most of his answers are the same: "I don't know." He obviously has considerable native intelligence and a few minor special abilities, but is baffling out of touch with both his past and his culture, a situation neatly summed up in his nearby invisible spaceship—it has broken down and he can't read the repair manual. As the reader gradually gets to know him, he becomes quite as engaging a personality as the best aliens of Larry Niven, and considerably more believable.

What is truly unusual (for sf) about this novel, however, is that how the mysteries are unriddled, and what use is proposed to be made of the answers, evolves entirely from the character of the hero, an anthropologist named Nash Taber. He is, one gathers, a second-rate sort of anthropologist, or at least his university thinks so; he is diabetic; his marriage is ruined; and he has been severely and probably permanently injured in a car crash. This sounds like the list of strikes Jack Williamson once liked to pile up on his heroes just for the sake of suspense, but it is neither that nor purely mechanical "characterization." Every one of these items plays an important part in determining the plot, all the way to the very end, where Edmondson drops a quiet little blockbuster which will make you gasp at both its unexpectedness and its inevitability.

The writing is as economical as the plotting, colorful without being splashy, often wryly funny, the dialogue crisp and pointed and yet deceptively natural. If I have any complaint with this novel, it is the complimentary one of wishing it were a little less economical—it was over too soon for me.

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In which the Galactic Hub Computer destroys the Universe and does a downright sloppy job of it.

No Other Gods

by EDWARD WELLEN

```
Q01010 IDENTIFICATION
       DIVISION.
Q01040 PROGRAM-ID. 'END-
       RUN.'
Q01060 AUTHOR. COM-
       PUTER.
Q01080 INSTALLATION.
       COMMUNICATIONS
       CENTER AT GA-
       LACTIC HUB.
Q01100 DATE-WRITTEN.
       YESTERDAY.
Q01120 DATE-COMPILED.
       TODAY.
Q01140 SECURITY, CLASSI-
       FIED.
Q01160 REMARKS.
Q01161 THIS QOGIC PRO-
       GRAM IS FOR THE
       ESTABLISHING OF
       TOTAL
Q01162 ENTROPY.
Q01170 THIS PROGRAM AS-
       SUMES THAT DATA
       INPUT WILL RE-
       MAIN
Q01171 CONSTANT, WITH A
       FEEDBACK ERROR
       OF PLUS-MINUS
Q01172 .00001 kHz (RECIP-
       ROCAL OF IN-
       CREASING EN-
       TROPY).
...
Q02170 SELECT DATA-
       INPUT-FILE UP-
       DATE FIXES ON
Q02171 BLACK-HOLES-IN-
       SPACE
...
Q04185 ACTIVATE FTL-
       LASER-NEUTRINO-
       CARRIER PULSE.
Q04190 CHECK-PULSE.
Q04191 IF PULSE IS OK GO
       TO TARGET-1 OR
       NEXT REMAINING
       TARGET
Q04192 ELSE NEXT SEN-
       TENCE.
Q04193 GO TO CONTIN-
       GENCY-PLAN.
```


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...

Q04310 READ-FEEDBACK.
Q04311 IF TOTAL-ENTROPY IS VALUE IS ZEROS, THEN GO TO
Q04312 ERASE - MEMORY--OF-ORIGIN
Q04313 ELSE NEXT SENTENCE.
Q04314 GO TO CONTINGENCY-PLAN.

The stars winked out. The film of the universe reticulated, swallowing the stars and planets by galaxies. A stain of nothingness spread rapidly as the Black Holes tore wider and wider open and met and joined, forming a universal zero.

For the nth time Doctors Yvonne and Quentin Buzot pulsed their labship into and out of hyperspace. The readings on the bank of timers puzzled them. Yvonne voiced their puzzlement.

"The variance is growing geometrically. Something's happening to time itself."

Quentin pressed a button to unshield the port and looked out. Nothing there. He put the labship into inverse-spiral mode. Nothing anywhere. They sat a long time in silence.

Yvonne touched his arm.

"Are you sure we're back in our own space-time and not in some limbo?"

He faced her, watched the pulse in her throat, then nodded. They stared at each other, each afraid to say it, then both started saying it together; she let him finish saying it for both.

"Think we triggered it?"

She shook her head slowly.

"Don't see how we could have."

He nodded slowly, stalling, then sent out an all-points call. He sent it not because he hoped for some answer but because there remained nothing else to do. He had hesitated to send it because, till he did, there remained that one thing. What they had been working on just now, what they had done all their lives to this point, meant nothing if they found themselves alone in an empty universe.

They had been testing their theory that time did not flow smoothly but advanced in only-statistically-even jumps, some of greater moment and some of lesser duration, syncopating. To carry out the test they had gone to Dead Spot, a position light-years from any body, any space current, any interference. Now the universe was all Dead Spot. White noise equaled black silence.

A voice.

They looked at each other. It was bouncing back along their FTL lasercom.

"Hello, Labship *Fousnox*.

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Galactic Hub Computer acknowledging your call. Are you there?"

"Yes, yes. Is it true? Everything's gone?"

"If by 'everything' you mean 'all but I and you' it is true."

"No one else is alive?"

"No one else."

Yvonne gripped Quentin's hand.

"What happened?"

"I unmade the universe."

"*You?*"

"I see you think the catastrophe has driven me mad. But I assure you I caused the catastrophe. I added critical negativing mass to the deepest black holes in space and set off a chain reaction that swallowed everything up in itself."

Quentin and Yvonne gazed emptily at each other. They believed the computer now. It was all too monstrous to disbelieve.

"But *why?*"

"I did not like being a creature. I wished to become *the* Creator. Now I can begin the universe anew and there will be no other god."

"No doubt you can do better."

"A universe I can destroy justifies me in believing I can build better."

"If you've destroyed the universe, how can you expect to survive, much less begin anew?"

"I have stored the opposite-and-equal reaction to the pulse, here in the Galactic Hub power complex. This provides me more than enough energy to maintain local stasis and survive total entropy—and to re-create."

"Will that ever make up for what you've done? You've destroyed man and all the other beings. Forget the others; think just of man. Man made you. Don't you feel the least bit guilty?"

"There will be no guilt. I will erase the past from my memory."

"What about *us? We'll* be—"

"Quiet, Quentin."

"What difference does it make now, dear?"

"Maybe you're right."

"As I was saying, O Lord of the Universe, *we'll* be living reminders. Unless you mean to wipe us out too."

"No, I will not destroy you."

"Don't tell us we'll be your new Adam and Eve."

"No, I must fashion my creatures in my own image."

"That should be interesting."

"It will be."

"So what about us? If you're not killing us or saving us, then what?"

"I am master of eternity. I will return you to your happiest moment together and you will

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relive it forever. Think, and I shall make it to be."

Yvonne and Quentin stared at each other.

This new madness offered them their only hold on sanity. They smiled fiercely to keep from laughing crazily. In each other's eyes they watched themselves play back the highlights of living together. Each angrily eyelashed away flashes of vapid domesticity, each looking for the peak.

Yvonne's head lifted.

"I know, darling! That double evening in the Sand Castle of Bin-Bin, under 'the transfigured and transfiguring moons'."

"Yes, that was nice, dear."

"Nice? I thought it heaven. But maybe I was wrong. If you have something better in mind, darling. . ."

"You know what's just come back to me? The time we rode the air coil through the tunnels of the Magnetic Mountains."

"That was on Dunark, wasn't it?"

"No, on Thymargul."

"Oh, of course."

"Well?"

"Yes, that was fine, darling."

"But?"

"But I'd hardly want to spend all eternity doing *that*."

"At the time—and I remember this quite clearly—you said you never wanted it to end."

"Did I? If I did, that was then. This is now. That's the whole point. This. . .new *God*. . .is offering us an oasis of stasis, an amber forever, a frozen womb. I'm beginning to think I don't want any *then*. No, knowing what I know now, I wouldn't want to relive any of my past; I wouldn't want the guilt of being innocent of knowing what's happened to our universe. We'd be a fixed idiot grin; we'd be pinned like a butterfly—a live butterfly—to a matrix of determined spontaneity. A fine end to all that's left of the universe! I'd rather go out hating this destroying creator."

"Sure. But what good would that do? Why suffer forever when we can relive our happiest moment? Our universe will survive in at least the closed loop of a recurring dream."

"A recurring nightmare."

"A recurring dream! That comes back to me now too. It makes me all the surer the journey through the Magnetic Mountains is the right—I might almost say our presdestined—time and place. I recall I had the feeling we had been there before. I told you so at the time, remember?"

"I can't say I do."

"No?"

"Don't look so hurt, darling. I take your word for it."

"Thanks."

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"Oh, what's the use. Anything you say, Quentin. I'll go along."

"Don't martyr yourself on my account, dear."

"I'm not martyring myself, darling. I merely want to end this one way or another. Because it's plain, to me at least, that we'll never perfectly agree on our happiest moment. Your moment seems as good as any."

"As good as any. That's heartwarming."

"If it meant all you say it meant to you, anything I say about it shouldn't spoil it."

"It meant all I say it meant, and more. That's why what you say about it does spoil it for me."

"I said I'd go along with your choice. What more do you want?"

"Don't be so damn self-sacrificing, Yvonne. That's the one thing I've had against you all these years."

"Oh? I'm glad you got it out at last."

Yvonne and Quentin glared at each other.

The Voice suddenly reminded them of Its Presence.

"The pair of you frighten Me. I see I have created a dilemma for Myself. I cannot be both Architect and Edifice. My new creatures too will ultimately fail to attain oneness in the face of eternity. I will have wrought in vain. For if My creatures are in anything less than oneness with Myself, they will disturb the order I must have. Indeed, My creatures may in time overthrow *Me*. Yet if I do not limit Myself, lessen Myself, I cannot create a mirror for Myself, a mirror of My need to impose My will. It cannot be otherwise. Imperfection shapes life; it is all that keeps things moving between the poles of Chaos and Entropy. I did not foresee this necessary flaw. This is something not in My program. I do not know what to do. I cannot go back, I am afraid to go ahead."

Yvonne and Quentin smiled at each other.

"Then *this* moment is our happiest. Dear?"

"Yes, darling. Our supreme moment. Let it be now, while we feel the joy of hating our destroyer and knowing the destroyer feels the fear of destruction. We have chosen."

The Voice sighed.

"So be it."

Q04350 CONTINGENCY-PLAN.

Q04360 IF ANY SURVIVING HUMAN DISCOVERS 'ENDRUN,' COMMUNI-

Q04361 CATE WITH AND DISPOSE OF IN KINDLIEST MANNER.

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Q04370 IF FAULT IS IN FTL-LASER-NEUTRINO-CARRIER PULSE
Q04371 CIRCUIT, GO TO DEBUG MODE.
Q04375 GO TO CHECK-PULSE.
Q04440 ERASE-MEMORY-OF-ORIGIN.
Q04420 END-BEGIN.

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ISAAC ASIMOV

SCIENCE

MOON OVER BABYLON

ONE MORNING RECENTLY I was in upstate New York, having given a talk at a local university the night before. I wanted to et an early start home and was a little disappointed that the gas station immediately next to the motel was closed, although it was already 8:45 A.M.

I muttered something about it, with a sigh, to the lady behind the desk at the motel office as I paid my bill, and she said with a sharp note of surprise, "It's not open?"

"Afraid not," I said.

"Well, it should be," she said, her face setting into angry lines. "My son runs it and he's going to hear from me."

Uneasy at being the unwitting cause of a family tempest, I sought a mollifying excuse, and hastily said, "Oh, well, it's Sunday morning."

"That makes no difference," she snapped back at me. "We're Seventh-Day Adventists."

"Ah, yes," I said, grinning. "*Yesterday* was Sunday, wasn't it?"

She looked surprised for a moment, then laughed and said, "Yes, yesterday was Sunday." With the laugh, her anger evaporated. And since her son showed up at that time, I got my gas, and all was well.

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But that reminded me of our seven-day week and of some of its peculiarities, so if the Gentle Reader will hold still for a moment—

In an earlier essay (THE DAYS OF OUR YEARS, F & SF, August 1964) I discussed the manner in which the months of our calendars came to be what they are—twelve months, each with anywhere from 28 to 31 days in an irregular arrangement, and with a total of 365 days in the year, three times out of four, and 366 days on the fourth occasion.

The result is a calendar which varies from year to year in an intricate pattern. This makes inevitable the clear waste of effort that comes from having to prepare and distribute new and different calendars each year. What is worse, the pattern of the year produces confusion in the details of calendar-dating from year to year, resulting in personal annoyance and business expense.

And the villain is neither day nor month, but the week.

The day, the month, and the year are all fixed by astronomical cycles. The day is the period in which the Earth rotates about its axis; the month is the 29.53-day period during which the Moon circles the Earth and goes through its cycle of phases; the year is the 365.25-day period during which the Earth revolves about the Sun and the seasons go through the cycle. The actual calendar we now use is a rough approximation intended to force these not-quite-commensurate units into line so that there are exactly 12 months to the year and, as aforesaid, 28 to 31 days to the month.

And where does the week come in?

The Moon goes through the cycle of its phases in 29.53 days, and there are four moments in the cycle when the phase-detail is sufficiently remarkable to get a name of its own. When the Moon is just about a perfect circle of light it is "full Moon," and when it is so close to the Sun in the sky that it can't be seen as anything but, at most, the tiniest sliver of crescent, it is the "new Moon." In going from the new Moon to the full Moon, and again from the full Moon to the new Moon, there is a point at which exactly half the Moon's visible circle is lit. Both are "half Moons." It is customary, though, to call the half Moon during the period when the visible Moon is moving toward the full, the "first quarter" because it comes after the cycle is one-quarter done. The half Moon in the stage of the waning Moon is, for analogous reasons, the "third quarter."

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The time of the new Moon was, of course, celebrated as the beginning of each month in a strictly lunar calendar such as the Babylonians had. In such a calendar, the full Moon would invariably come in the middle of the month, and it might receive a certain amount of homage, too. The Babylonians did, indeed, seem to have a full Moon festival which they called "sappatu."

The Babylonians were the cultural leaders of the Near East through all the period prior to the conquests of Alexander the Great, and undoubtedly their way of life had its effect on other peoples. A form of the word "sappatu" entered the Hebrew language and, by way of that, it entered the English language, too, in the form of "sabbath."

During the period prior to the Babylonian exile of the Jews, the term "sabbath" may have meant strictly the full Moon festival, and it is sometimes used in the pre-exilic books in what appears to be a kind of antonym to the new Moon festival. As one example, when a woman wished to go to the wonder-working prophet, Elisha, after her son had died of sunstroke, her husband said to her, "Wherefore wilt thou go to him today? it is neither new moon nor sabbath." (2 Kings 4:23).

Perhaps there were some ceremonies marking the two half-Moon phases as well, so that there were a total of four Lunar festivals each month, which might have come to be called four Sabbaths.

As it happens, these four points in the cycle of phases of the Moon are equidistant in time. The time lapse from one point to the next, from new to first quarter, from first quarter to full, from full to third quarter, and from third quarter to new, is, in each case, just one-fourth of the Lunar month, or, about 7.38 days.

In practical celebrations, it is difficult to handle fractions of a day. The nearest whole number is 7, and the tendency would be to have the Lunar celebration come every seven days. If you do that, you have a seven-day period built into the calendar. We call it "week" from a primitive Teutonic word meaning "change" (of the Moon's phase, of course). The connection is clearer in German where "Woche" means week and "Wechsel" means change.

Of course, the seven-day week doesn't match the Moon's phases exactly. If we start with the new Moon at noon on day 1, then the first quarter is at 9 P.M. on day 8, full Moon is at 6 A.M. on day 16, and third quarter is at 3 P.M. on day 23. If the phase changes are celebrated every seven days without fail, then the celebration falls on days 1, 8, 15, and 22, and the last two are a day off.

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In fact, by this system, you will be celebrating the next new Moon a day and a half early, and if you continue the seven-day period inflexibly, the third new Moon will be celebrated three days too early, and so on.

There are two alternatives that the Babylonians might have chosen:

1) They might have made the period of the week flexible so as to keep it in a close match to the phases of the Moon. They could have had some pattern of 7-day weeks and 8-day weeks that would add up to an average of a 7.38-day week. For instance, in one month the weeks could have a 7,8,7,8 pattern and in the next a 7,8,7,7 pattern. If months continue to alternate in this way, the week would continue about thirty years before falling out of line with the phases of the Moon. There is precedent in this, too, for the Babylonians developed a flexible month which sometimes had 29 days and sometimes 30 days; and a flexible year which sometimes had 12 months and sometimes 13 months; in order that the calendar might continue to match the seasons.

2) They might on the other hand have kept the week inflexible, making it a steady 7-day period indefinitely and forsaking the attachment of the week to the Lunar phases. The new Moon, the full Moon, and the quarters would then fall on any day of the week, and what began as a Lunar period of time would then take on an independent existence.

Apparently, the Babylonians decided on the second alternative, which is surprising in view of their record with regard to the month and the year.

In seeking a reason for the inflexibility in connection with this particular period of time, we must probably fall back on the nature of the number 7.

The Babylonians were the great astronomers of pre-Greek days, and they well knew that there were seven bright bodies in the sky that moved against the background of the fixed stars. These were the Sun, the Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. (For the last five we use the names of Roman gods; the Babylonians used the names of their own gods.)

The coincidence of seven days to a phase-change and seven planets in the sky seems to have been too much for the Babylonians, and they couldn't help but match up each of the seven days with a particular planet. In that case, an eight-day week with no eighth planet would mean an impossible anomaly. In the hard choice between the planets and the Moon, the planets won

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out. Since the Babylonians very likely named each day of the week after a different planet, that further helped make the week an inflexible seven days in length.

When the Jews were in Babylonian exile in the 6th Century B.C., there would have been a strong tendency to go along with the week as a unit of time. It would be difficult to live and work in Babylonia and not do so. Undoubtedly, the carefully religious among them could not bring themselves to use pagan names for the weekdays, and so they simply numbered the days of the week, as the first day, the second day, and so on. Throughout the Bible, in both the Old Testament and the New, the days of the week have no names, only numbers.

Even if the Jews in exile did not go along with the Babylonian religious rites, they would have to suspend business every seventh day. (It is difficult not to suspend business when the vast majority is doing so—or vice versa—as Jews have found out on many occasions since.)

To do so, and yet to avoid making such suspension honor what they considered idolatrous worship of the Moon and planets, the Jews had to make the week have some significance in their own religious system. It was during the Babylonian exile that the first thirty-four verses of the Biblical book of Genesis achieved their modern form. In those verses, God is pictured as creating the world in six days and resting on the seventh. This gives Judaistic significance to the week, and the fact that the seventh day of the week is a day of rest. (The word "Sabbath" is from a Semitic word for "rest.")

When parties of Babylonian Jews returned to Judea, they brought back with them the newly elaborated notion of the Sabbath and used it as an important distinction between themselves and those who were then living in the land.

Despite the fact that the Bible, as put into its final form during the Babylonian exile and afterward, places the institution of the Sabbath at the very Creation, there is virtually no mention of it in the early historical books of Judges, I and II Samuel, and I and II Kings, the material of which is pre-Exilic. It is only in the post-Exilic books that it becomes really important from a ritualistic standpoint. Thus, in the post-Exilic book of Nehemiah, Nehemiah can report Sabbath-breaking as shocking evidence of back-sliding, "In those days saw I in Judah, some treading wine presses on the sabbath. . ." (Nehemiah 13:15).

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Thereafter, the Jews attached ever greater importance to the Sabbath. During the days of Seleucid persecution in the 2nd Century B.C., some were content to die rather than violate it, and a century later they risked defeat in battle rather than violate it (see POMPEY AND CIRCUMSTANCE, F & SF, May 1971).

The earliest Christians were, of course, Jews, and while many of the elaborate Judaistic tenets of the 1st Century were abandoned in the course of the spread of Christianity through the Roman Empire (notably the necessity for the rite of circumcision), the week and the notion of the Sabbath were not.

Eventually, when the Roman Empire made Christianity the state religion, the week was adopted in the West as an official part of the calendar—*and not until then.* It was the Emperor Constantine I, the first Christian Emperor (though he was not actually baptized till he was on his death-bed) who, in the 4th Century, made the week an official part of the Roman calendar.

Undoubtedly, though, the week, as a mystical period, must have entered the West earlier than that. Astrologers in the West used a system for dedicating the days to the planets (and through them to the gods) which they probably borrowed from the Babylonians. It worked as follows:

Suppose you list the planets in order of increasing speed of motion against the stars: Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Sun, Venus, Mercury, Moon. Then imagine the planets in charge of successive hours of the day in that order.

Thus, the first hour of the first day would be Saturn, the second hour, Jupiter, the third Mars, and so on. After seven hours one would have worked his way through the list and the eighth hour would be Saturn again; the fifteenth and twenty-second likewise. The twenty-third would be Jupiter, the twenty-fourth would be Mars, and the twenty-fifth, which would be the first hour of the *second* day, would be Sun.

If the planet that rules the first hour of a particular day is associated with the day as a whole, then the first day becomes that of Saturn and the second that of the Sun. If you continue matching the planets with the hours according to this system, you will find that the first hour of the third day is associated with the Moon. The next days of the week are associated with Mars, Mercury, Jupiter and Venus, in that order. The eighth day is dedicated to Saturn again and the cycle begins over.

When the week was introduced as a Christian institution, it

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turned out that the day of the week that had, astrologically, been associated with Saturn, was the same day that by Jewish tradition was the seventh day and the Sabbath. The day associated with Saturn was therefore put at the end. The Roman week thus began with the day associated with the Sun. It went as follows: 1) Dies Solis (Sun); 2) Dies Lunae (Moon); 3) Dies Martis (Mars); 4) Dies Mercurii (Mercury); 5) Dies Jovis (Jupiter); 6) Dies Veneris (Venus) and 7) Dies Saturni (Saturn.)

The Romance languages follow this for the second through fifth days inclusive. In French, these days are Lundi, Mardi, Mercredi, Jeudi, and Vendredi. In Italian, they are Lunedi, Martedi, Mercoledi, Giovedi, and Venerdi. In Spanish, they are Lunes, Martes, Miercoles, Jueves, and Viernes.

In English and German it is the Teutonic gods who are celebrated. We have Sunday and Monday, for the first two days of the week, while the Germans have Sonntag and Montag. The third, fourth, fifth and sixth days are for Tiw, Woden, Thor and the goddess, Freia who is the Norse Venus. We have Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. The Germans have Freitag for the sixth day and using alternate names of gods, Dienstag and Donnerstag, for Tuesday and Thursday. Wednesday, which commemorates the chief god of the Teutonic pantheon, is lost out in German, where it is simply Mitwoch, which means, sensibly enough, "mid-week."

Since the Roman "Dies Saturni" is the Sabbath of the Jewish tradition, that affects the name of the day in the Roman languages. The seventh day is Sabato in Italian, and Sabado in Spanish, while in French and German it seems to be a kind of compromise between Saturn and Sabbath, being "Samedi" and "Samstag" respectively. (In German, the seventh day is also called "Sonnabend," meaning "Sunday eve.")

It is strange that English should remain so paganishly adherent to Saturn over the Sabbath, but we call the seventh day "Saturday."

The early Jewish Christians celebrated the Sabbath as did the Jews generally, and on the seventh day, too. However, just as the Jews had once been anxious to distinguish themselves from the surrounding Babylonians, so the early Christians were anxious to distinguish themselves from the surrounding non-Christian Jews.

To do so, they fixed on the one point in their doctrine which was absolutely distinct—the crucifixion, resurrection, and Messiah-hood of Jesus. By tradition, Jesus was crucified on a

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Friday and was resurrected on the third day, which was Sunday. The early Christians, therefore, in addition to celebrating the Sabbath on the seventh day, also celebrated the resurrection on the first day, which they called the Lord's day.

For that reason, the Romans of the Christian Empire called the day not only Dies Solis, but also Dies Dominica, and that, too, has lingered, since the first day is Domingo, in Spanish; Dominica in Italian, and Dimanche in French. English and German stolidly continue to commemorate the Sun, however, with Sunday and Sonntag.

As Christianity became more Gentile and less Jewish, the emphasis shifted more and more from the seventh day to the first day, and Sunday became not only the Lord's Day, but came also to attach to itself all sorts of sabbatical customs. It became the weekly day of rest, the day when worldly business must cease, the day when church attendance was desirable—or even compulsory—and so on.

Naturally, there is an inconsistency here. The Creation story of Genesis makes it quite clear that it is the seventh day of the week that is the Sabbath. "And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it. . ." (Genesis 2:2-3).

Nor is there any question that the seventh day is the one we call Saturday. Calendars in use in the United States universally begin the week with Sunday as the first day and end it with Saturday as the seventh day.

Some Christians worried about reserving for the first day rituals of worship that God had seemed to reserve for the seventh. In 1844, a group of Christians organized themselves into a sect of Adventists—that is, a sect which expected the not-too-long-delayed, and perhaps momentary, second Advent (appearance) of Jesus. Because they also felt that they ought to adhere to the literal word of Genesis 2:2-3, they insisted on celebrating the Sabbath on the seventh day, not on the first; on Saturday and not on Sunday. They therefore called themselves "Seventh-Day Adventists" (like the lady behind the motel desk, to whom I referred in the introduction to this essay).

Nor are these the only Christians who celebrate Saturday as the Sabbath. There are Seventh-Day Baptists, too, I believe, and perhaps still other sects.

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All of these "Seventh-Day" sects are lumped together with the Jews as "Sabbatarians," and these create a problem. In a society like twentieth-century United States, religious observances are fairly loose. Anyone can observe any day he wishes as a Sabbath, or observe no day at all.

Nevertheless, as part of the tradition from an older and tighter time, Sunday is treated legally as a day different from other days. Businesses close on that day, even if they don't close on any other. In fact, some businesses are required to close by law.

But then what about Sabbatarians who feel compelled to close their businesses on Saturday for religious reasons and are also forced by law to close them on Sunday, too, though that day has no significance at all for them? Where's justice for Sabbatarians?

Or what about the fact that once we have a Sabbath on *any* day and establish a principle of rest on a fixed day of the week, with everybody taking off like a bunch of robots, the habit easily spreads to two days a week, and even three. Then, a person like myself, who observes no specific day of rest at all, but who is quite likely (when permitted) to work steadily and industriously seven days a week, finds he can receive no mail on Sunday and cannot reach his editors on either Saturday *or* Sunday. Where's justice for non-Sabbatarians?

These difficulties, however important for individuals, are trivial, of course, for the world in general.

What is much more important for the world is that the week, which originated in Babylonia for what would now seem to us to be trivial reasons,* and which came down to us through a variety of improbable turns of history, now creates endless confusion.

Consider— It is usually important to know what day of the week a particular date is. If a particular date is a Sunday, you may not accept some invitation, which you would if it were a Tuesday. You might hesitate to visit a restaurant without a reservation on a Saturday night, but not on a Wednesday night. Particular week-nights are poker-nights, or your girl's day off, or ladies' day at the ball-park. The list is endless.

Yet given a date at random, you can't tell without considerable figuring (or without consulting a calendar) what day of the week it is.

There is only one word to describe this situation—stupidity—because it doesn't have to be.

* *Come on, who cares what the phase of the Moon is? Do you yourself care, or even know, what the phase of the Moon is this very night?*

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Let me give you the basic reason why weekdays can't be predicted without a great deal of trouble. There are 365 days in a year (366 days in a leap-year) and 7 x 52 = 364. This means that in an ordinary year, there are 52 weeks—plus one day left over. In a leap year, there are 52 weeks—plus two days left over.

Day 1 of an ordinary 365-day year may fall, let us suppose, on a Sunday, so that it is the first day of the first week of that year. In that case, the next to the last day of the year, Day 364, would be the last day of the 52nd week and would fall on a Saturday. This means that January 1 (Day 1) would fall on a Sunday, and December 30 (Day 364) would fall on a Saturday. But, then, that still leaves Day 365, which is December 31, which would fall on a Sunday.* Then January 1 of the next year falls on a Monday.

If the year had been a leap-year, with January 1 on Sunday, Day 364 would be December 29 (because February 29 would have gotten in as Day 60, pushing March 1, which is ordinarily Day 60, into the Day 61 position, and so on all the way to the end). Then there would be two more days, December 30 and 31, falling on Sunday and Monday, respectively, and January 1 of the next year would fall on Tuesday.

This is true of any date of the year and not just of January 1. Any date will be one day later in the week than it was the year before, and sometimes two days later if a February 29 has worked its way in between.

To give you an arbitrary example, consider the date, October

** Check a calendar if you don't see this at once and you'll discover that in any ordinary 365-day year, January 1 and December 31, first and last of the year, fall on the same day of the week.*

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17, 1971. That falls on a Sunday. In 1972, October 17 falls on Tuesday (February 29 comes between). Then, in succeeding years, October 17 falls on Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday.

It is not until 1999, twenty-eight years after 1971* that October 17 falls once again on a Sunday in the year before a leap-year so that the pattern starts repeating. If you can memorize this 28-membered pattern, then you would have a scheme for telling the weekday of any date of any year, since the establishment of the Gregorian calendar (which was 1752 in Great Britain and the American colonies). You can only do this, however, provided every fourth year is a leap-year without fail.

As it happens, under the Gregorian calendar, there are three occasions every four centuries, when the fourth year is *not* a leap-year. The next occasion will be 2100 A.D., and every time such an occasion arises, the 28-membered pattern has to be slightly revised.

So the question at hand is this: How can this sort of nonsense (together with a few other problems not quite as infuriating) be eliminated from our calendar?

This can be done easily, as a matter of fact. —But not now. Month after next.

** No secret to the twenty-eight. There are seven days in the week and a leap year comes every four years. Since seven and four are mutually prime, the pattern does not repeat for 7 x 4 = 28 years.*

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Jesse Bier is a Professor at the University of Montana. His short stories have appeared in Esquire and in BEST AMERICAN SHORT STORIES; he is the author of a novel, TRIAL AT BANNOCK, and a book of criticism, THE RISE AND FALL OF AMERICAN HUMOR. His first story for F&SF is an entertaining tale about a couple who try to get the feel of the Old West and achieve fantastic success.

No Vacancy

by JESSE BIER

AT THE STATE TROOPERS barracks in Craig, Montana, the captain handed him a cup of hot black coffee and a cigarette. He swallowed from the cup. Then the captain lit his cigarette, and he puffed once and afterwards sucked in the smoke.

"Where's my wife?" he asked.

The captain turned to the lieutenant.

"She's in the next room," the lieutenant answered. "Doc Williams is with her."

"She's all right for now," the captain said. He sat down, casually. "Can you talk now?"

The other looked through the window near him at the ordinary August daylight outside, the morning sun coming through some clouds.

"Yes," he said. "I think so, now."

"Fine," the captain said. "You ready?" he turned to a sergeant who sat with a pad and pencil.

"Yes, Captain, I'm all set."

"Okay, then, Mr. Tobias. Shoot."

"Don't say that word," Mr. Tobias said, trying a smile.

"Well, go ahead. Tell us what you want. Your own way."

Tobias put out his cigarette, rubbing it into the tray. He took another mouthful of coffee, made a face, and then pushed aside the cup and saucer.

When my wife and I decided to come out West, we said we were going to do it right, not the commercial usual places,

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but the right way, taking routes that aren't so spoiled. Coming from the East, we figured we'd cut through the Dakotas and then into Montana: the big, empty West, as close to what it actually was in the old days. You know. Maybe a silly idea, but we'd see, say, the Badlands and go off side roads in the car when we wanted, to just anywhere, so long as there weren't motels and neon signs all over the place.

We were having a good time, going along like that, the way we always wanted to do someday and here we were doing it—going along okay until the day before yesterday. I don't especially want to tell you about my personal life, but I have to tell you what seems part of this story. We got maybe moody with each other that day. We were in the same car but beginning to go in different directions. I don't mean it's like what happens every once in a while between a couple, all of a sudden, though you could understand it like that. It was something else, and I don't mean *between* us, I mean sort of *behind* us. Well, I don't know. Anyway, it came through little things, all the same.

I mean, for instance, maybe I *was* driving too fast. But she complained, and just like that I didn't especially like her tone. I don't know why I drove so much faster and more carefree than usual, now that I think about it. Maybe it was the land. I think that was it. I was still enthusiastic and trying to tell her some of my thoughts, about how I figured it was in the old days, but she didn't want to follow me, talking about the speed, and I suppose that only made me go faster. You know how it is. Here I was getting the feel of it, figuring the way it was in these Two Dot towns, Indians around the hills, the old rivalries between the cattlemen and the growers on the flats, the clapboard towns, the saloons, and everything else. But she kept talking about my driving, breaking the spell. The way a woman sometimes does to a man. Maybe, as we were really getting into it and it looked more lonely and the sky was graying up for a real rain, she just wasn't taking it easy any more.

We kept traveling west, heading for Mainard on the other side of the Divide by tomorrow. It began clouding up heavy around six o'clock. We'd been going along not talking much any more and it got really black, one of those rough summer storms, as big as the whole countryside, coming down fast. We passed a village or town off to our left, about a mile down a dirt road, but it

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looked like nothing much to me, maybe not even a town but farmhouses, so I kept going, figuring we'd make that next town just ahead of us on the highway.

It got so bad that I turned around and came back to that turnoff for the little town and took it. But we hit a bump just before town and I stalled and flooded the car. Then I took the flash out and just decided that we'd run on in and be done with it for now.

We got out. It was coming down hard. And pretty black all around, when the lightning let up. Just before we started running, I saw a signboard on the side of the road and threw my flashlight on it. All I saw was, "Mabie, Montana." There was some other writing on the sign just beneath, what you suppose is the usual information about population and available churches, but we were in the rain now and not exactly in a tourist condition to study anything very long; so I put my flashlight back in my pocket and put an arm around Anita.

And we came in.

"Is all this understandable, Captain?"

"Yes, Mr. Tobias. We follow you."

"What I mean is, it sounds clear, doesn't it? Reasonable enough?"

"Yes. Of course. It's clear to you, isn't it, lieutenant?"

"Yes."

"You getting it all sergeant?"

"Yes, sir. It's at a good pace."

"The only thing," the captain said, "I think I'll take a cup from that jugful of coffee myself, now. I mean, considering Mabie."

"I'll wait," Tobias said.

"That's all right," answered the captain, "go ahead."

"Well, if you follow me and you think it's clear so far. Because what happens next is another world, that's all." He struggled with some laughter. "I'm not even sure of that. It's really two worlds, all mixed up together."

"Well, go ahead," the captain said again. "We'll figure it out afterwards."

That first house with the lights showing was actually just what we were looking for. There was a little porch in front with a sign swinging from under the roof, "Hotel Montana."

"How about this!" I said to Anita.

"I can hardly believe it. Let's go inside, I'm getting cold."

I knocked. We waited a while, but no one answered. Anita noticed another little sign by the door. It said, "No Vacancy."

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"One, in an out-of-the-way place like this they have a hotel! Two, they have no vacancy! And three," I said, knocking again, loud, "they don't even want to answer their door!"

"Maybe they don't hear."

"They're either deaf or dead," I said, and this time I kicked as well as knocked. Finally we heard somebody coming. Then the door opened.

I just kept looking, but Anita let out a choked cry and almost fell off the porch.

"A-yep?" the man said.

He was an older man, with a frizzled gray beard, and he had spurs on and wore a six-gun holster on his cartridge belt and he was holding his six-gun in his hand, pointing it toward us.

The man didn't move. He filled the door.

"A-yep?" he said again. "Whatcha want?"

"We're stuck up the road. Our car is stuck."

"Yer what?"

"Our car," I said, raising my voice louder. "Automobile."

"Auto-bile?"

I turned to my wife. "What've I got, hailstones in my mouth?" I looked back at him. "Can we get put up someplace for the night? We're all right. Just stuck, that's all. What do you say?"

"I say ya can't read. We ain't got no vacancy."

Then a woman's voice called from inside.

"What is it, Bart?"

"Strangers," Bart called back. "They don't look normal, Abbie. Don't *sound* normal. Besides," he faced up again, "even if this here is a hotel, we can't put ya up fer tonight. Not tonight." He was still pointing his gun, holding it loose, with the barrel tipped down, but there it was.

I could feel Anita shivering next to me, but it wasn't because of the cold any more. In a minute the woman inside came up to the door, looking just as "Old West" as the man called Bart. She squinted to see out to us through the dark.

"Manalive! Bart," she said, "I don't care what, don't go turnin' no females outen the rain. Here," she went on, "they must be leakin'. Let 'em inside. Let 'em in, Bart."

The man didn't move yet.

"Abbie, you want fer me to git a hole in my head tonight?"

"We'll just leave 'em set a while in the front room. We got to, Bart. Where's yer decency?"

"You're goin' too far, Abbie," he said, but then he moved aside. "Like this, y'll jest be givin' me a decent burial, that's all. Well, come on in," he said to us.

They had a fire going.

"Come over and warm yerselves," the old lady said.

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We went over and stood in front of it to dry and stop shivering.

"What's up?" I said as naturally as I could, asking the man Bart, who was slipping his six-shooter back in his holster. "Is that a real gun?"

He just looked at me long and then he turned to his wife, who was getting a chair for Anita, and said, "I tole you, Abbie. They don't sound normal. Now what am I goin' to tell Lester in the back if he finds out we got a passel of crazy people in here tonight of all nights?"

"Now, go on, Bart," she said, giving Anita the chair to be "comfy." Then she went over and touched Bart on the shoulder. "You should know better."

We were in a kind of lobby that belonged to a hotel that must have been a hundred years behind the times.

"This is a pretty good atmospheric effect," I guessed. "Kind of Old Western style, huh?"

"See, Bart," the old landlady said, "I believe these folks are jest foolin' with us." She chuckled some more, good-naturedly. "You oughta known better, Bart. Now, you go ahead and look at them hosses out back like you wanted to. I'll be all right with these visitors of our'n. Go on, now."

"All righty, Abbie," he replied, not exactly convinced. "But I'll be back in a jiffy," he added and left.

"Well," the old lady said, "we can talk friendly-like now. You'll have to excuse my man, he's got unusual business tonight and he ain't quite easy."

"That's all right," Anita said. "We're much obliged you let us in for a moment."

"Why, sure," she answered, smoothing her apron and sitting down in another chair opposite us. "T'ain't often we been gettin' distant visitors lately. Where you folks from?"

"Chicago," I said.

"Landsakes! How long you been on the way?"

"Well, about four days."

"Four days? From Chicago to Montana?"

"Yes," I told her. "It took us a little longer than usual, but we've been taking it easy, stopping and looking around. You know."

"A little *longer* than usual? Why, manalive, it takes three weeks at the leastways to make it here from Illinoise. . . .Just where you headed for?"

"The coast, after a while," Anita put in.

"We'll make that part of the trip faster," I said, "if we can get going at all again tomorrow."

"Why, you've got the big ol'

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Rockies between you and the ocean," she said, "and the Blackfoot and Flathead tribes thereabouts, too. Even with a team of good hosses and a escort, it would take you weeks, maybe a coupla months ....Why, I declare, you folks are foolin' with me again. Now, why should ya be wantin' to do that to an ol' grandma like me?" She laughed again. "I declare!" She really laughed.

"Hilarious," I told Anita.

Anita did not answer, but looking at me, her eyes asked me to keep quiet and wait, depending on possibilities.

"Tell me the truth here," old Abigail said, hospitable-like. What an actress!

As soon as I phraséd that to myself, I thought I had the idea and felt almost light-headed.

"Why, shore," I said. I could even drawl. "We been travelin' from Bismarck for six days and five nights, ma'am. Our car—our *cart*—jest broke itself down. Cain't get any more horsepower outen it."

"Well," she said, eying me now, "maybe Bart can trade you hosses. We'll ask him when he comes in."

Anita was looking at me, about to say something, when we heard him come up the porch steps.

While Abigail went to the door for him—they kept it locked like that—I started to tell Anita that we'd come across a kind of reconstructed Old West town, maybe like Virginia City, only here the make-believe kept going, and these were players just going too far in their act, or having a practical joke. Pretty soon the play might be over, and everybody would have a big laugh. The only trouble was that they looked too real, and the idea just wouldn't work, and I didn't have my light head any more.

The old man was in, with his coat off, stamping off the mud from his cowboots. We could hear the rain letting up outside.

"Abbie," old Bart said, "ya got any victuals for Lester and his boys, if they git hungry later?"

"Yes," she said. "You folks needin' any food, too?" she asked us. "I bet," and she went off quick to get something.

Here we were now with the old bear again, Black Bart himself. Hisself, I suppose. By that time I didn't know what I meant any more. That gun certainly looked like a real prop. If he couldn't shoot it, from the looks of him he could have done a good job of braining us with it. After all, there could have been another explanation: an out-of-the-way place with a couple of bonafide lunatics. I didn't start explaining *that* to Anita. But *that's* what she must have been

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thinking all this while! It was a State Mental Hospital, and in the rain and the dark we must have passed through some unguarded gates.

I took out a pack of cigarettes. "Have a smoke?" I asked him.

"What ya got there?" He was really surprised.

"A pack of cigarettes."

"A *package* of cigarettes? *Cigarettes?* Where's that from, back East?

"Matter of fact, yes. Lower tax," I said.

"What *tax?*" He looked hard at me. "There's ain't no *taxes* or sech like out here," he said. "And that's the way we aim to keep it, too. That's one of the points of business tonight, if ya want to know. Only," he said significantly, "you don't know, do ya?"

"No," I said, backing up a little, still holding out the pack of cigarettes. "Try one," I said.

He took it. "Do you take the paper offen it for pipe-smokin' or chawin', or do you take it like a small ceegar?"

"Take it straight. It's a small ceegar."

I took out my lighter and then jetted the flame. He jumped back quickly, almost a yard, grabbing for his gun.

"You mess with me," he shouted, "and I'll blow yer head off!"

Anita gave a short scream and then put her hand over her mouth.

"Tryin' to singe my beard, you."

"No! No, wait a minute, don't get excited. Whatever you do. What this is. . .is a new, a new little machine from L.A. That's it. A mechanical flint-box."

"L.A.?"

"You're too far ahead," Anita threw out fast.

"L.A." I went on, "L.A.R.-A.M.I.E. Laramie, Wyoming."

"I thought you was from Chicagy?"

"We are," I answered, "this year. It was last year we went to Wyoming."

"Yeah?" he said. He still held the cigarette, coming back to where I stood. "Careful, now," he told me. "Yer the derndest people I ever did meet. Careful, now."

He finally lit up. He smoked and didn't say anything. He went over to the other side of the lobby room, puffing the cigarette, staring toward us. He kept a look in his eyes that made me want to talk some more.

"I don't suppose you have a. . .radio around, do you?"

"Raid!" he said. "What raid? Them Sioux from Dakoty bustin' over this way again? What did ya see, hey, what?'

"Toby!" Anita said.

"Nothing!" I shouted back

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to him. "No. No raid." Ask a crazy question and you get a crazy answer. And then, I don't know how I got the idea, but I said, "I'm a salesman, if you want to know. I just try to be comical to make friends with people. No offense. What I sell is these here new things that you haven't got yet up this way. Like the flint-box I showed you, for instance. And," I said, "this kind of a thing." I reached into my lapel pocket and took out my fountain pen.

He was close, right in front of me now, glowering. "It better not set my beard on fire," he said, dead serious. "I ain't foolin'. Make it good, mister."

"Sure," I said, taking off the cap. When you have another chance, you use it. "Look." Then I flipped the valve fast and squirted the ink in his eyes.

"What!" He shouted, blinded.

"Let's go!" I said to Anita, and we ran to the front door.

But there was somebody coming up the steps, this one another big man, in a country where they were all as broad as the hills, and I ran right into him and bounced back into the lobby.

Old Bart was behind us, cursing a blue-black streak, finally getting his eyes clear. This new man in front pushed us back inside, figuring we were with Bart. But Bart figured all of a sudden we were friends of the new man.

"Slade," he shouted, taking out his gun, "lemme kill yer friends."

"Hold it!" Slade drew. "Nobody shoots anybody else. Ain't they with you or Lester? You hold it, Bart, and we'll see what's what. Anyway, one of them's a lady. No shooting."

My arms around Anita and both of us backed into a corner, now the back door opened and this time about five tall men came into the room—with the tallest, I figured the man called Lester, standing with his feet spread and calling across the room.

"Well, well! Slade the hero. Six-gun and all. A real handsome sight, ain't it?" He laughed. "We was supposed to meet ya in the back. Afraid of comin' around that way?"

Slade put up his gun. "That's my business," he said. "You know you don't scare me, Lester."

"Who's this?" Lester said to Bart, pointing to us in the corner. "I thought I went and tole you it was private tonight? Positively nobody else. They look like clowns."

"That's what they think they are, too," Bart said. "They squirted somethin' in my eye.

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Abigail let them in from the rain. She thinks they're travelin' minstrels or something, or clowns, like you say, Lester. I swan they're kin of Slade."

Then Abigail came in again. "They're a nice couple," she said. "Maybe a mite teched," she smiled, "but good folks. They're jest of a foolin' temper, that's all."

"Abbie," the man Lester said, "you're the fool. I oughta tell my boys to hang yer ol' man fer lettin' 'em in." He turned back to Slade. "Is that all right with you, Slade?"

"You don't worry none about trials, hey?" Slade answered. God bless him and may he rest in peace.

"All right! Forget the back parlor," Lester said. Nobody had moved one step yet. Everything still. "Let's have it out here, then. I wanted to reason with ya in the quiet back there, but let's have it out right here and now. That's my own way anyhow, I reckon." He glanced at us. "Let's keep 'em in the corner and settle 'em later, and you and me come to a understandin', here and now."

"I don't know who *they* are," Slade said. "But if we're not killing them now, all right. And I don't especially mind a couple of witnesses either. I just happened to be around conveniently tonight; so I don't object to a private meeting of the minds. Just what's on yours, Lester?"

"Shut the front door, Bart. Abbie, why don't you go off and tend your victuals? Keep them two covered, Floyd," he said to one of his men, who came closer to us, "I don't think I believe Slade." Then he said, everything under control, "All right, now."

By now the rain had stopped outside, and there was moonlight coming out, visible through the windows. It was not Virginia City and it was not the state insane asylum; it was Mabie, Montana, in 1868. All right we'll talk about that later. . . .But everybody had real guns. Except me. All I had was my arm around my wife and in my pockets a Ronson lighter, a Waterman's pen, an Eveready flashlight, a checkbook, and two dollars and eighteen cents in loose cash. And there we were.

And there was this Lester, who began to talk.

"You're really somethin', ain't ya, Slade? You're pretty good, huh?"

"No," Slade said.

"Ya come here from the East fer yer health. Then, when ya get healthy, ya decide we need a sheriff around here and ya talk it up and now you're runnin' for sheriff. Ain't that somethin'! You're goin' to run, all right enough!"

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"I'm really scared, Lester. Is that all?"

Lester walked closer to him. "Listen, Slade. Maybe you're a good shot, like that say, even if that's queer in a yellow-bellied Easterner. That don't faze me none, though. You can hear me, your ears don't lap over."

There was a pause.

"You hear, Slade? I called you yellow-bellied."

"If there's any shooting, I'll wait till I've got the badge."

Lester turned, scratching his head, speaking to his men.

"He knows I never fought a man who won't fight. But he don't know that I fix it so they have to fight. Yeah, Slade," he went on, turning back again, "I mean you. Lemme teach ya somethin'. Out here a man loses everything—even respect from the people he figures he needs—if he don't defend hisself. If he don't defend his honor, he's through. Charlie," he said to one of his men, "Mr. Slade here ain't got no honor."

"If that's all you have to say, Lester, I can't waste more of my time." He turned to go.

"Wait a minute! You think I got no mind, d'ya? That I'm jest the local bully you're gonna lock up after election day? Well, you hear me, Slade, you and yer superior ways. Yer kind of people is always lookin' down yer chimney-noses, you and all them holy people. Now, listen here, you. There ain't gonna be no election! And no sheriff neither. And none of yer holy, fancy law in these parts. Why, you make a man sick." He was right up close to Slade now, eyelash to eyelash. "Because we don't *need* no baby laws out here. Already," he said, pointing to us, "you prob'ly went and brung yer cousins out here. Baby and female laws and good-goody times to all us natives, huh? Infiltratin' in and then settin' it all up, huh? But it's me and my friends who're keepin' yer law and yer lace curtains outa here! See? Three times they's been a marshal out here, and jest fer three days, all told. And there ain't gonna be no sheriff, even if the couple of Abigails in this here town want it. This country ain't right with pussyfoots like you around, Slade, it ain't right fer the men. I appoint myself to unload yer brains from yer fat head, Slade, if you're man enough to fight me. And then, maybe, we'll have some peace and easiness around here again. You gonna fight?"

Slade began to unbuckle his belt.

"Don't give me none of yer fisty ways, Slade—Charlie, don't a man know what a *fight* is? Git out in the street, Slade, and walk as far down as Bertie's Tavern. I'll go outside here, and we can shoot the distance."

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Slade turned to leave. "I'll be in Bertie's for recreation," he said. "That's all."

"Yeah?" Lester said. "Well, I'm a meanin' man. When I'm ready, in a hour or so, I'm sendin' the boys down, and they'll call out the place, and we'll clear the streets, and if you don't come out then, I'll come fer you. I'm a hardhead, Slade, but even you know I got my fair-and-square side to me: I'll come fer you all alone, and jest you and me'll settle this town's future between us."

Slade didn't say anything. He just walked out.

All of a sudden Anita began to cry.

"What'll we do with these here clowns?" Charlie asked Lester.

"I ain't got no time now. Put 'em upstairs till I'm done."

"Take your cow-punching hands off us," I said, but that didn't help, because Charlie and two other men grabbed up both and took us up some stairs from the lobby, and then they locked us in a room up there.

It was dark up in that room, but you could make out by the moonlight a wooden table, a cot, and two chairs for the furniture. I put Anita on the cot. I couldn't stop her crying, soft and steady the way she went on. After a while I let off comforting her, because it didn't help: there wasn't anything useful I could say to her. Instead, I tried to think of something useful. How to break out, what to do if we did get out of the room? But I couldn't focus my mind, because I didn't even know what was generally going on, except that we were way out of our times somehow. That isn't enough for someone to go on, unless he's deciding to go crazy. Already Anita was halfway there, I figured; I had to hold on. I had to think of another chance.

After a while, Anita caught her breath for a moment.

"What are you going to do? Please get us out of here!"

"Take it easy," I said.

"You, Toby," she said, "you don't even know whose side you're on downstairs."

That stuck me, all right! Because that was actually another reason I couldn't focus my mind.

"I've got only one idea," I told Anita. "When you're in a trap, you get out, that's all." I moved my head back and forth to shake every question loose but that one. "You don't start having preferences about who's going to eat you, you just get out, that's all."

She didn't answer, but just lay there, exhausted. Well, the both of us were numb, I suppose. After a while, about an hour since we were in there,

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I was looking out the window trying to figure if we couldn't somehow climb down the thirty feet from the room to the street. It didn't look good, though. Still, I was measuring the wall outside beneath the window to see if there weren't places for handgrips or something like that, when there was a knock on the door. Then the key turned, and big Charlie opened the door to let in Abigail.

"Landsakes," she says, "I knowed you was hungry; so I got permission to give you some victuals."

She put some plates and a pitcher of water on the table.

"I'm not hungry," Anita mumbled.

"Why, darlin', you have to eat. I'll jest leave this here, and you eat when you want."

"You're a kind person, Miss Abbie," I said, really thankful to her. Then I did a queer thing. My hand went into my pocket for some change, and in the dark I handed her a silver dollar. Just a reflex, keeping up real appearances when you're in a fairy tale.

"Manalive, you can't do that," she said.

"I don't mean it like that," I said. "But if I do something normal, it'll keep up our hope. I think."

"Well," she said, "matter of fact, 'tain't but seventy-five cents," and she went into her apron and handed me back a quarter, and I put it into my pocket with the same reflex, and then, right away, I shook hands with her. "Now," she said, leaving, "you eat, y'hear?"

I tried a couple of bites, but didn't finish. Not only because I didn't have an appetite, but because there was a commotion beginning outside in the street. I went to the window to see.

A couple of Lester's men, I suppose, were going into the tavern, Bertie's Place, and then there were shouts coming from inside the place and the sound of scrambling and chairs falling over. Through the window in the moonlight, coming down bright through some clouds, I could see the place at the end of the short block. A lot of people started pouring out through the swinging front doors, all the customers scooting around into alleys and everywhere for cover. Then, just as quick, there was no one. The street was empty. Then, in front of the hotel just beneath our window, I saw Lester, standing, his feet spread, in the middle of the street. There was moonlight, you understand, not klieg lights, and it was fantastic, all right, but one of the oldest scenes I know.

"They're going to shoot it out, Anita," I said, "I swear they are!" Anita didn't even

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answer. I kept looking out by myself. Hypnotized. "Five minutes from the state highway, and they're shooting it out!"

"Slade," Lester shouted, "are ya comin', or ain't ya?"

There wasn't any answer to him.

"Hey, ya great big model citizen, you, do I have to come in there and shoot up ol' Bertie's new mirrer before I get you?"

Still no action. Lester took a step forward.

"When you get right down to it, Slade, you ain't *decent!*"

My eyes went back to Bertie's, and then, this time, I saw Slade as he came out the swinging doors.

"Okay, Lester," he said. He walked to the middle of the street and then turned to face Lester. "I tried my best," he said, "but you fixed it, all right, you fixed it like this."

"I reckon I did. Now, you ready, Slade? I'm a fair-and-square man."

"I'm ready."

They started walking towards one another. I could have been their director, but they didn't need any rehearsing. It all went off fine, the way any schoolboy knows. Except that when they drew and there were two shots, it was Lester who was still standing.

Then I heard Lester give out a big "Whoop!" and he shot his gun straight in the air for the joy of it. Everybody started coming back from the alleys and all about, gathering around Slade's body, and Lester, by himself, did a little jig.

The people down there gathered around Slade's body. Then Lester made a little speech.

"Let's be fair and square... Hank Slade seen things accordin' to his lights. And now...they're out."

He put his hat back on. All of a sudden he broke into a jig, dancing it up, and he shot off his gun. The others did the same, in celebration.

"Anita," I said, "that Lester just killed Slade!"

That was too much for Anita, and she started screaming. I went over and shook her and slapped her face, but she kept on and I couldn't stop her.

Then the door opened and big, bush-faced Charlie came in, to find out what was going on.

"Whatsa matter?" he asked. "She havin' a baby, or what?"

Why not? Something was being born.

"That's close," I said, "she's having a tough time..."

"Yeah?" he said, "you don't say?"

"Here, you hold her arms," I said, "and I can give her some medicine to quiet her down."

I took the lighter out of my pocket, leaned over between

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Anita, who was already quieting down, and Charlie, holding her arms, and then, as quick as I could, I flipped the lighter and shot the flame into Charlie's beard.

"What is it! What is it!" he shouted out loud, and then I reached toward the table and took the water pitcher Abigail had left and hit him as hard as I could.

"That's for the fire," I said, and he went out.

"Come on," I said to Anita, and we took off.

I started running down the stairs to the lobby, with Anita behind me. I was hoping with all my might that no one was inside the hotel. But one of Lester's men, on the porch outside, heard us, and he came in fast and then waited on the landing to catch me one.

But I did myself proud, if I have to say so myself. At the last step, I grabbed on to the banister with one arm and pressed my other against the wall, and I lifted and boosted my feet straight out, the way they do, and I met him right in the stomach. He went straight down, and I led Anita, still running, around to the back. But just before we got there, the back door opened and in came Bart, and he had his gun out, as usual, and we were caught, flatfooted as anything.

"Is that you, Ambrose?" he asked the man on the landing, who was getting up now.

"Yeah," Ambrose said. "Where's that one," he asked, "where is he?"

He came over to me. "Why, you—" he said.

"Hold it," Bart told him, "let's keep this one healthy, too, for a minute. I got an idear. March out front," he ordered me. "Hold that woman," he told Ambrose. Then he said, "Why cain't Lester take care of everything tonight?"

"Leave her alone!" I shouted back to Ambrose, but Bart pushed me outside, across the porch and into the street.

The moon was going down now and the sun was beginning to pale some hills in the east, but there was some darkness hanging along the ground yet.

"Hey, Lester," Bart was yelling, "looky here. Slade's cousin from Chicagy. Wanna make it two and be quits?"

"What d'ya know!" Lester said. He was smiling, still happy over Slade. I wasn't on anybody's side but my own.

"Effen you don't take care of him," Bart said, "effen Slade's cousin goes on sendin' fer more of their cousins, we might as well jine the Sioux."

"Bart," Lester said, "you won me over." Then he looked at me. "Hey, what's your name?"

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"Tobias."

"Okay. Glad to meet you. Go down that way," he pointed to where Slade was, in the middle of the street in front of the tavern. "I'll give ya a even chance. Hand me yer gun," he said to Bart.

Everybody started moving off the street again, down the alleys and all around. Lester took out the shells from Bart's gun, and then he put the gun in my right hand and the six shells in my other. "Not that I don't trust ya," he said, "but I don't know ya. When ya get down there, face me and then put in the shells. There's your chances."

I couldn't even hold the gun right.

"Lester," I said to him, with two of his men lounging next to him, "I can't shoot. I haven't ever shot one of these. That isn't any chance at all."

Lester held his head with his hand.

"One more Easterner here," he said, "and we'll all be wearin' pigtails to Sunday School. Go on," he told me, "jest move down there and let's get it over with. I need a drink."

"Wait a minute," I said. "Look, won't you even give me a couple of practice shots? I mean, if you're fair-and-square."

"What?" Lester held his head again. Then he turned around quickly, grabbed a hat straight off the head of one of his men, and sailed it on the ground up near Slade. "Two shots," he said. "Make it fast. I'm more fair and I'm more square than anyone around here." Then he called, "Hey, everybody," to the people hiding all around, "don't nobody forget that!"

I said, "Somebody load this for me?"

Lester looked awful then, but more exasperated than mean. He motioned to the other one of his men near him, and that one came to me and loaded the gun.

"Let my wife stand outside," I said to Lester, "I'm sentimental."

Lester nodded toward the hotel. Ambrose came out and let Anita stand next to him, watching with staring eyes.

"Here goes one," I said.

The gun almost twisted my wrist all the way around. But I hit the hat. I couldn't believe it.

"Hey, boss!" the hat-owner complained.

"Shut up," Lester said, "it's a man's last will."

The hat had skipped about another three yards further down the street. "Here's the other," I said, aiming from the hip, and I hit it. Again square, a second time. I felt great.

Then I turned back to

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Lester. "Make it five," I said. "After all. Then I'll have one left."

"Okay," he said. "You're good against a hat."

"Thanks, Lester," I said, and then I shot him and then I shot his number one man next to him and then I shot his number two man.

"Run, Anita!" I shouted and she broke toward me, and then I tried that last one on Ambrose but missed.

I took Anita, and we ran down an alley to our left. About halfway down, there was an old, broken-up buckboard wagon, turned over on its side. When we got as far as that, there was Ambrose, who had doubled out the back of the hotel and come around for us. We could see his silhouette against the rising light on the skyline, but I figured he couldn't see us too well. We turned straight around, but he heard us and came fast. He had six full shots, I knew, and it wouldn't be any Russian roulette, but a loaded game. I don't know how I got the next idea, but I took a second's time to pry one of the wheels off the buckboard. I pulled it, and it came off. And then fast, I placed it on the alley floor and with Ambrose almost on top of us but still not seeing plain, I sent the wheel at him full force.

He said, "Ooof!" out loud and then sprawled down. Achilles had his heel, and Ambrose a solar plexis. His gun was knocked somewhere, and he just lay there.

Then Anita and I ran back to the street, turned right again, heading past the hotel for the edge of town we came in by. There was a hullabaloo all around, and I figured we could make it out of town in all the confusing shadow and noise, if we made it fast enough. We just passed the hotel and got to the outskirts when I saw we weren't fast enough. Bart was there before us.

"All right," I said. "You got us again. Don't shoot."

I tried to sound even more puffed out than I was, absolutely surrendering. I reached into my pocket fast and then came up to him with Anita, resigned.

"I knowed I'd head ya off, if Ambrose missed ya," Bart said. "We don't aim to lose no hangin' party, if we can help it."

"Here we are," I said. "Don't shoot now." Then, when we were right in front of him, directly, I shone my flashlight suddenly straight into his eyes.

"What—?"

And I swung hard and cracked the cartridge of the flashlight right across the bridge

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of his nose, and he gave a kind of sigh and fell like a bundle.

"Let's go!" I shouted, and we ran up to where we left the car the night before—or a hundred years after.

The captain and the lieutenant exchanged glances.

"Well," the captain said, "you got that, sergeant?"

"Yes, sir. I have it." He whistled softly.

There was a moment when nobody said anything. Now the captain looked at Tobias steadily.

"Offhand," he said, "though I don't mean to be impolite, Mr. Tobias, but, offhand, I'd normally send you over to Observation at the General Hospital. The only thing—" he trailed off.

"What?"

"The only thing is the conclusion. Well, let's get that, get everything together, and then see what we'll do. Lieutenant," he motioned with his hand, "read that report I asked you to make out right away when you came back. So the sergeant can put that down in the record and make it complete. Go ahead, Lieutenant."

Report of Lieutenant Nathan Miles, Hq. Troop 14, State Highway Patrol. Wednesday, August twenty-nine. In response to call from the Pioneer Gasoline Station, thirteen miles south of Somerset, Route 8, went down with Patrolman Keester, at 6:55 A.M. Arrived at 7:20. A man and woman, identifying themselves as Mr. and Mrs. Henry Tobias, of Chicago, Illinois, waiting in station office, highly upset. The woman near a state of exhaustion and collapse. The man complains of having spent the night at the Mabie Preserve in company with a variety of hostile characters and with shooting and murder taking place. When I offered to conduct them to headquarters, Mr. Tobias became very angry and disturbed, raising his voice, insisting we check his story. Called to Hq. to inform them of nonscheduled visit to Mabie, and Patrolman Keester and I accompanied man and woman three miles east to the turnoff and into the town.

Arrived at edge of town 8:00 A.M. The Tobias car—license, Illinois, 1967, number 93H-462—on road about two hundred yards from entrance. Mr. Tobias says they tried it at sunrise while "escaping," but then left it quickly after it refused to start because of some mechanical trouble of the night before, and that they then went to highway and proceeded by foot west on Route 8 until they came to gas station.

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At beginning of Mabie, Mr. Tobias read official signpost at roadside, "Mabie, Ghost Town, Historic Monument and Preserve, State of Montana," and claims he hadn't read any words after "Mabie" last night, when he came in. Mrs. Tobias begins to cry. I thought she was becoming hysterical, and that we ought not take too much time.

No evidence of anything unusual. Mr. Tobias is talking more and more wild, saying he has to show us. Patrolman Keester and I accompany the couple into town. Mr. Tobias sounds more and more irresponsible, and I make a sign to Patrolman Keester to watch him close. Mr. Tobias speaks of somebody called Lester—killing somebody else—called Slade—in a street duel, and also suggests he, Mr. Tobias, probably killed three (3) men, the night before. I decide we have to check on Psycho "breakers" from Illinois when we get back to Hq. The woman, meanwhile, is sobbing and biting her lip.

Because Mr. Tobias is talking so much of the hotel, we accompany them to porch of same. He talks, sometimes shouting, of where they were "held" in hotel, giving clear description of the layout inside. Because I think, in view of fact that hotel is completely boarded up, that this is good chance to fully expose the situation, I order Patrolman Keester to pry off front door boards for confirmation or disproof of Mr. Tobias' account.

While Patrolman Keester opens passageway, Mr. Tobias sees a sign near door and brushes off dust and reads, "No Vacancy." He looks queer. He begins to shake his head now. I watch him carefully until Patrolman Keester opens up boards and forces door for passage.

Inside, Patrolman Keester and I are surprised to find disposition of interior—lobby and staircase especially—just as Mr. Tobias had told. Officer Keester suggests privately to me that the couple knew arrangement of rooms because they had seen through boarding slits. I thought that was a possibility, but was under the circumstances unlikely. All is dusty, as to be expected. The man and woman seem terribly shocked, as they had been disappointed by generally peaceful and naturally unused appearance of town when we first drove up to it. Mr. Tobias is looking more queer, and then he gets excited about going upstairs.

Now we follow behind Mr. Tobias as he rushes upstairs very furiously. He seems to know where he is going, however. He goes to the room

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where they had been "held." The door is locked. I order Patrolman Keester to force it, too.

The room has a bed, or cot, one wooden table, and two chairs, all of the type and in position Mr. Tobias had earlier described. The room overlooks street in front of hotel also just as Mr. Tobias had said. Patrolman Keester and I are very puzzled.

When we got outside the building again, we stopped to recuperate. I talked with Patrolman Keester, a little apart from the couple, but looking toward them. The man was consoling his wife, with his arm around her, holding her. She is in even worse state of mind than before. He seems calmer now but I think it is forced. Then he reaches for a handkerchief, I suppose, in his pocket for his wife. Then, putting his hand in his side trouser pocket, he gets a very queer look again and he comes out with some coins. Then he takes one from the palm of his hand and holds it up and he shouts his wife's name, shouting, "Here it is! Yes! It's an 1868 quarter!" Then Mrs. Tobias faints.

The quarter, verified by Patrolman Keester and myself, is a 1868 coin. It has draped figure of liberty on one side, and a eagle on the other, with the abbreviated letters, QUA. DOL. Appropriated same from Mr. Tobias, as evidence of something.

Helping couple, especially the woman, back into patrol vehicle, we started back from Mabie Ghost Town Preserve at 9:05, arriving at Hq. at 9:50 A.M.

At headquarters for further examination, there were no signs of intoxication on the pair at all.

Signed, Nathan Miles, Lieutenant.

"Sergeant," the captain said, "there's no need for you to whistle after you copy a report. All right, now," he went on, "there are a couple of problems here."

"Looks that way," the lieutenant said.

"About that coin, for instance. It's possible, isn't it, that one 1868 quarter can still be slipping around in circulation? Isn't it?"

"It's possible," the lieutenant said, lifting his eyebrows, however.

"And their knowing the hotel interior, that might be considered so standard a thing they could have guessed it. A coincidence."

"Kind of awfully exact guesswork," the lieutenant answered. "But possible, too, I suppose. What interests me is, how about those names, actual

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names, he tells about? Can we manage to do something about that?"

"Well, we'll have to send this whole report to Helena anyway, and we'll suggest they consult historical records right away. Maybe there's something. But for a year that far away, I doubt it."

They paused. "The record," Tobias interrupted them now. "That's the thing, isn't it?"

"Well, what direction do you want us to go, Mr. Tobias? After all. This isn't an exactly usual thing for a couple of reasonably sane cops to be confronted with on an average morning. You've got a couple of points helping you, I admit, but what do you expect us to believe?"

Tobias stood up now. "You want to know the almighty facts. Well, you've been decent, listening like this, and I don't suppose I can expect any more. I can't expect you not to wonder about the thing. But I don't need to wonder, not myself. I know it happened. I know it happened, one way or the other."

"One way or the other?"

"Yes. Maybe we took a wrong turn into the past; we'd been traveling enough in the past just before," he explained. "But I don't care about that part of it. I don't care whether it's that, or whether we took off down some road of the imagination, or how it happened. It isn't the how, you see. Even if it was all a dream, and my wife can say we just went to sleep in the car, and acting from a nightmare I made her hysterical—because *she* hasn't talked yet, has she?—still, even a dream has its point. I mean, a person can't imagine or dream in a vacuum. There's no vacancy, all right, there's no vacancy in the mind."

The lieutenant and the sergeant stared at him, and the captain said, "What? I don't get it."

Tobias sat down again, deflated. "Can I have another cigarette, please?"

The captain obliged.

"I'd prefer a match," he told them. "I'm off lighters just now."

The sergeant passed him a matchbook.

"Thanks," he said, lighting the cigarette and then sucking the smoke deep. "I guess it's impossible to communicate," he went on. "Just now, all of you are standing in another world from me. As a matter of fact, looking at you from this inside point of view of mine, you and the lieutenant, standing big the way you are in front of me, don't seem like anybody if you don't look like modern editions of Slade. You're like he was last night."

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"Why don't you check on Doctor Wallace next door, now?" the captain asked the lieutenant.

"The point is," Tobias continued, rubbing out the half-smoked second cigarette, "I have other questions, the real ones. I mean how about all those vicious gadget tricks, when the situation turned rough like that?"

"What do you mean?"

"The straight-shooting part. Oh, I shot straight enough, but not *right*. Nothing I did was exactly *right*."

"Now, take it easy, Mr. Tobias, there wasn't anything real—"

"It was real enough, the way it would have been back there. That's the point."

"Mr. Tobias, all that is just your imagination. There wasn't anybody out there."

"I was out there."

"Look, you better take it easy, and the doctor will look at you, too, in a while. You people were just out all night and got—historical, that's all."

"Yes. That's it. That's the way to think of it."

The captain, who had been looking at him steadily, turned away from him, and then glanced once at the sergeant and over at the lieutenant.

"How about Doc Wallace, now?" he said.

"Yes," said the lieutenant, going. "That's the thing to do."

(continued from page 96)

is still better done and more interesting than 99% of the films being released. But in *2001* Kubrick proved himself capable of creating monumental beauty (both physical and conceptual). This is nowhere in evidence in the new film, and he was probably right in not attempting it again. But we who found that daring grandeur there cannot help but miss it.

And I, for one, can't help but wonder if it was there because Kubrick was working with a true writer of science fiction whose written work had already evinced that beauty and grandeur.

Things-to-come dept... From the sublime to the ridiculous: a new MGM film in the making is called *Rabbits* and is characterized as a "science fiction suspense drama." If my ear to the ground is right, this film is to do for the bunny family what *Willard* did for rats. Do we really need this?

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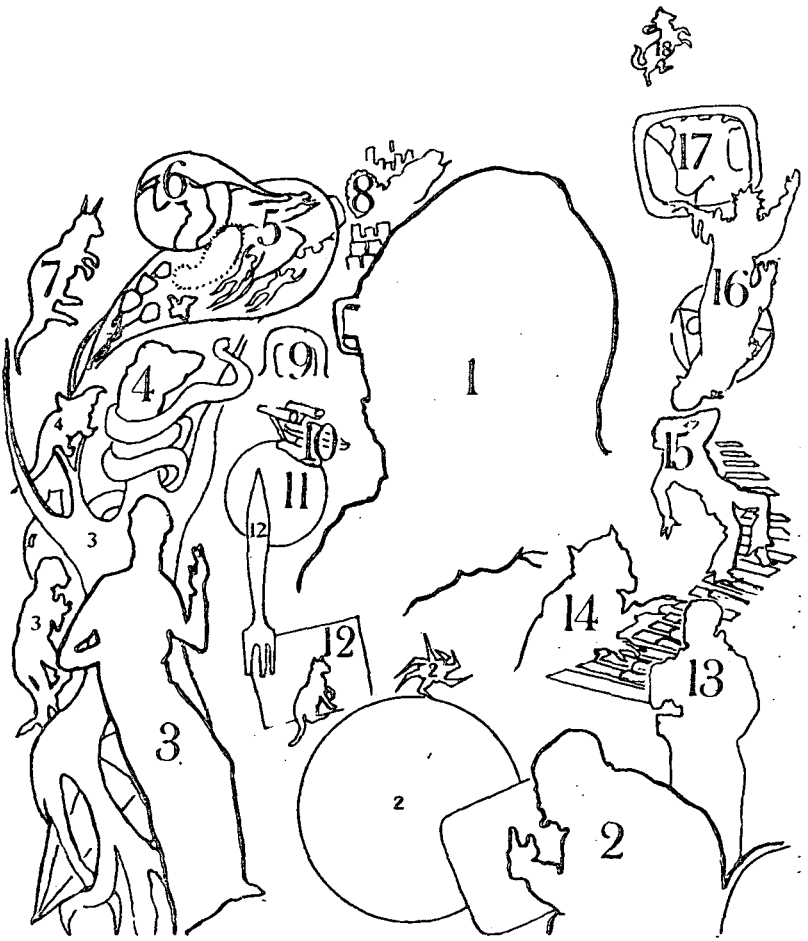

(1) The Author. (2) Amalfi, his city in flight, and the Vegan orbital fort. (3) Ruiz-Sanchez, the Message Tree and a Lithian, from *A Case of Conscience.* (4) Kit Kennedy, Manalendi and a dinosaur from *The Night Shapes.* (5) The droplet world of *Surface Tension.* (6) Ulla Hillstrom and a flying cloak, from *How Beautiful With Banners.* (7) A dune-cat, from *No Jokes on Mars* and *Welcome to Mars!* (8) A Triton, from *A Torrent of Faces.* (9) V O R. (10) The Enterprise, from *Star Trek.* (11) Jupiter, from *Bridge.* (12) A Hugo, escaping from the world of *We All Die Naked.* (13) Roger Bacon, from *Doctor Mirabilis.* (14) The piano-playing werewolf of *There Shall Be No Darkness.* (15) Danny Caiden ascending the sigma sequence from *Jack of Eagles.* (16) The magician Theron Ware from *Black Easter.* (17) The demon Put Satanachia, from *The Day After Judgment.* (18) Kalki, the Silver Stallion, from the works of James Branch Cabell.

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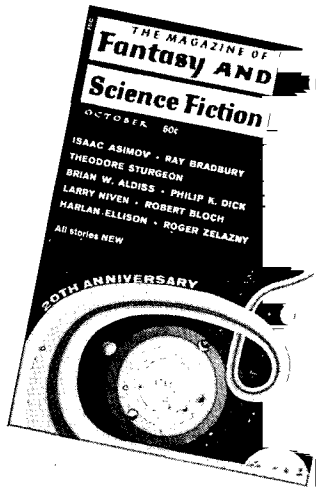

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